

BL

2775

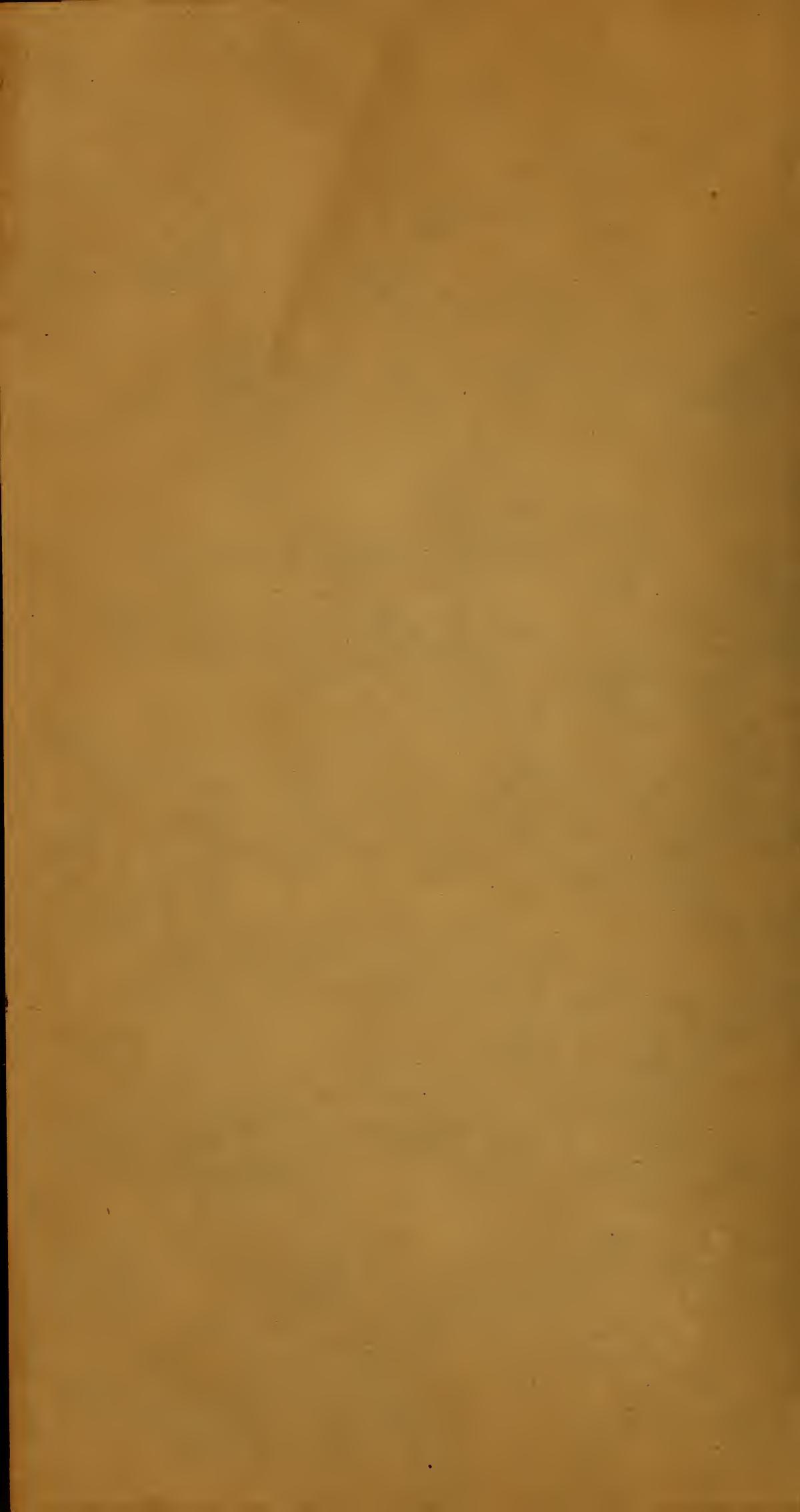
.P6

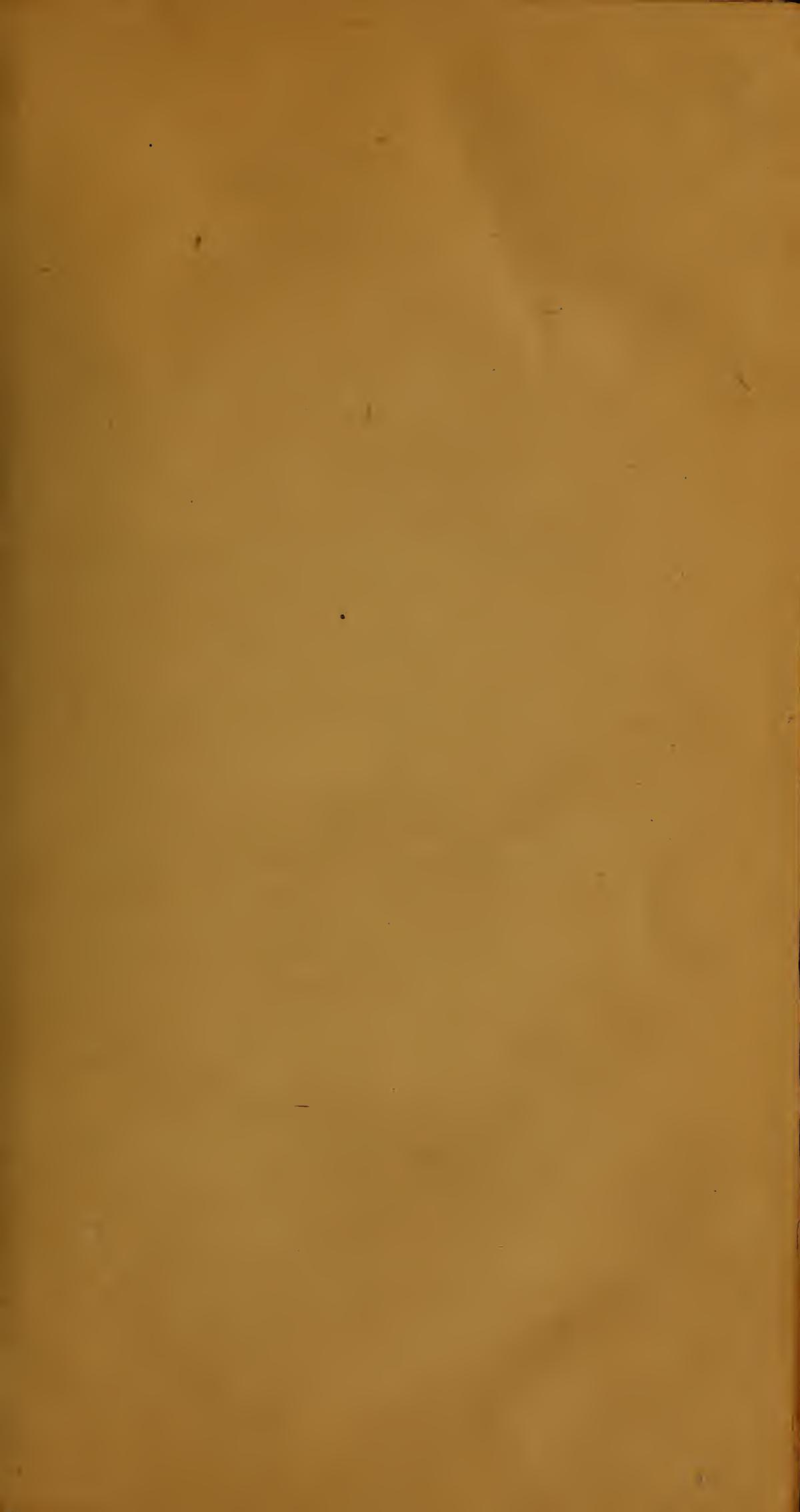
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

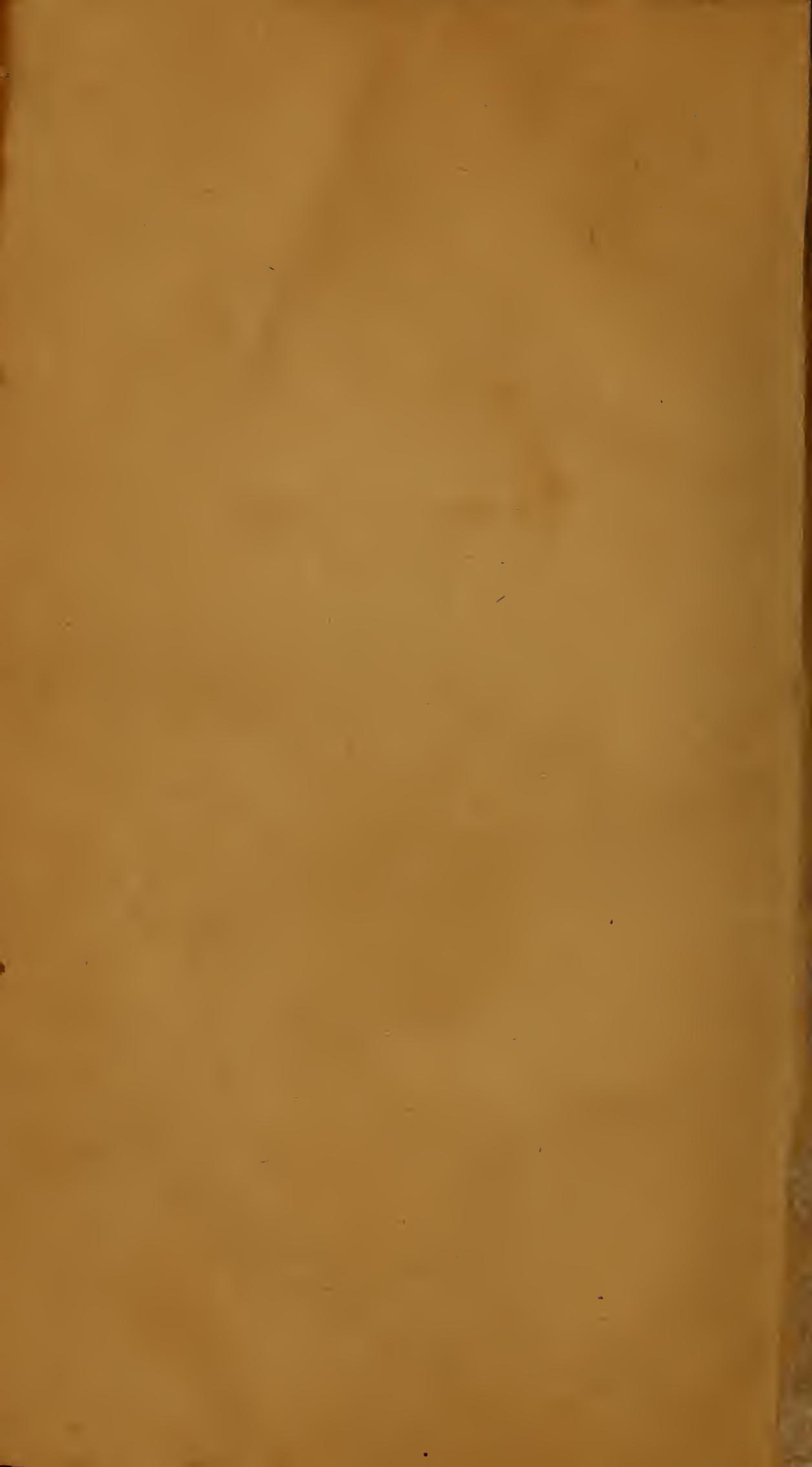
Chap. BL 2775

Shelf P6

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.







NEW EDITION
OF PLAIN TRUTH:

OR STRICTURES ON

SUPERSTITION, HYPOCRISY, PRIESTCRAFT
AND FANATICISM.

ALSO, ON THE PREVAILING

ORTHODOXY OF THE DAY, &c.

BY A

FRIEND TO PURE AND UNDEFILED RELIGION.

Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.
Apostle Paul.

WORCESTER:
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR AND PROPRIETOR.

1840.

BL 2975
.P6

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year
1839,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of Massachusetts.

P R E F A C E .

In the following pages, no labored disquisition has been attempted. To distinguish true religion from its abuses, mockeries, perversions and counterfeits; from bigotry, superstition, hypocrisy, priestcraft and delusion; from those false creeds and sectarian systems which have their origin in selfish policy, and derive their support from the ignorance and credulity of mankind; in short, to distinguish religion in its purity from those absurd and spurious doctrines of creed-makers, and those practical delinquences of their followers, which have so deplorably contributed to bring it into disrepute;—such has been my design. This I have endeavored to do with plainness, fidelity, and according to the best of my ability. In treating of the various topics selected for discussion, I am sensible I have frequently fallen into a more diffuse style of writing than I could have wished. The work is also deficient in that “lucid order” and methodical arrangement which are so desirable in extended compositions; for I have had little opportunity to classify my thoughts. I have written on with rapidity, regardless of rhetorical rules and elegance of diction. *Truth* has been my great object; and although I have presented her in plain habiliments, nay even *naked*, I trust few will be found so fastidious as to take it amiss—however some of her professed friends dare not for very shame look upon her in that state. No wonder they blush! But Truth herself is less prudish about her attire; and though she is worthy of the most glorious ornaments, I have not been over solitious of adorning her, since Falsehood is, at least, as often decked in colors of the rainbow as Truth.

It can be no sacrilege to demolish, if possible, those strong holds of error which serve to shelter the hypocrite and fanatic. It is the part of duty to bear testimony against those who pervert or disgrace christianity. Let it not be inferred from the fact that I have boldly and plainly told such delinquents *the truth*, that I am therefore their enemy. The bitterest rebuke is more wholesome to those who merit it, than that false charity and affected candor which would spare or extenuate their sin. Nor is it true that censure and philanthropy are necessarily discordant. If we recur to the example of the prophets and apostles, we shall find that those inspired men neither spared nor tolerated error in any form whatever. They frowned on all sin—especially priestcraft and hypocrisy they treated with the utmost severity. If we recur to still higher example, we shall see how terrible were the rebukes of Christ. How often he repeats the denunciation, “Wo unto

you scribes and Pharises, hypocrites?" From these high examples, our line of duty is easily traced. Let us then expose and testify against whatever is wrong, fearless of incurring the displeasure of any individual or sect. We are not to palliate. We are to "cry aloud and spare not." Found though in high places, and under saintly garb, we are not to wink at iniquity. Whatever is reprehensible should be held up as such. To witness that which is wrong with apathy and unconcern, is to acquiesce in it. To pass it by in silence is cowardice and crime.

When superstition erects her mistaken altar; when insane fanaticism frightens women and children with its ravings; when falsehood assumes the semblance of truth; when priestcraft lays its foundations deep and strong; when bigotry claims infallibility, and aims all the missiles of malignity against those who dare question the sacredness of the claim; when hypocrisy "seems a saint when most it plays the devil;" when boastful self-righteousness utters the arrogant command, "Stand off, for I am holier than thou;" when persecution, pretending to do God service, exults over its victim and wreaks its vengeance on the weak and defenceless; it is *then* that every individual possessed of enlightened understanding and moral courage, and who has the interests of truth, of justice, humanity and pure religion near at heart, will volunteer in the sacred cause of dispelling the clouds of darkness and delusion; of teaching the enthusiast and fanatic common sense, and how to preserve mental sobriety; of vanquishing falsehood; exposing the arts of a crafty clergy; putting down the bigot's power; tearing off the hypocrite's cloak; teaching charity and humility to the self-righteous, and asserting that natural and unalienable right of men, the liberty of worshipping God according to the dictates of conscience.

Let no one think, for a moment, that I seek, under color of a false pretext, to injure the cause of religion—pure, unadulterated religion—the glorious cause of the blessed Redeemer. He who comes to this combat is not a disguised infidel. Far be it from me to send forth aught to the world that is calculated to have a sceptical or licentious tendency. Should possibly any one make a bad use of this book, I trust the good it will be the means of doing will far out balance the evil. The needed and timely application of the lash often works wonderful reformation. Even the arrow of ridicule sometimes bears salutary shame on its feather.

My strictures are addressed to the plain good sense of people; for I did not choose to imitate the example of certain learned divines who deal largely in unintelligible rant, so well calculated to bewilder and mislead the mind. Away with preposterous mysteries, traditionary jar-

gion, and metaphysics run mad! Let us have useful knowledge—definite ideas—plain truth—common sense. I have dealt only in such truths as strike the unprejudiced mind at first blush. The pictures I have attempted to sketch of priestcraft, superstition, hypocrisy, &c., though by no means sufficiently vivid and striking, I trust are not very inaccurate. Sombre coloring was required. But to draw a portrait of *priestcraft*, to the very life, would require a more skillful hand.

I am aware it is held by some, that the laity are incapable of writing on subjects relative to religion; that when a *permit* is give to a layman to take up the pen theological, his writings should be subject to clerical supervision. * * * * What I now communicate to the public, though hastily put together, is the result of much reflection. Nothing but a sense of duty could have drawn me to figure as an author, with qualifications so inadequate. I owe no responsibility save to God and my own conscience, for that which I have written; from this, I do not wish to be exonerated, and if I did, it were not possible I should be. It is sacred, and cannot be annulled. In this responsibility, no one shares with me: no one's advice in relation to the work has been consulted, and no one's assistance in its composition, borrowed. The task has been an unwelcome one; would to Heaven there had existed no occasion for undertaking it! But we should labor to establish what is right, and to overthrow what is wrong. As auxiliary to this purpose, let us avail ourselves of free discussion, which has ever led to the ultimate triumph of correct principle. To cherish and evince a becoming zeal for the welfare of pure and undefiled religion, is an indispensable duty.

Variouly appreciated this production will doubtless be. A *work* of imperfection, it goes forth to meet a *world* of imperfection. Probably some well-meaning people will not relish the strong truths it deals in. But let them be assured that I have honestly advanced my opinions; let them charitably believe I have been solely prompted by a desire to reform religious abuses, and thus to promote the great cause of christianity.

In concluding my preface, spun out I confess disproportionably long, (I beg pardon of my readers alike for its prolixity and loquacious egotism,) I would observe that a faithful friend at my elbow gently reminds me, that I have furnished another proof of the correctness of the maxim that *he who writes a PREFACE to his book builds a monument to his own vanity*. Well, be it so; the awkwardness of the attempt dissuades me from putting in any special plea in my own vindication.



PLAIN TRUTH.

[A NEW EDITION.]

CHAPTER I.

CONTENTS.—The transcendent importance of Christianity. Its perversion, and the pernicious example of hypocrites, fanatics and bigots, constitute the great cause of infidelity. What made Voltaire an infidel. Two kinds of unbelief—that of the heart, and that of the understanding. The latter a misfortune rather than a crime. When once implanted in the mind not easily eradicated. A class of sceptics and unbelievers who approve and admire the christian morality. What hinders or restrains their faith. Their infidelity not a matter of choice.

CHRISTIANITY has most undoubtedly higher claims to the attention of mankind, than any other subject of inquiry. Its pure morality and glorious revelation are infinitely important; inasmuch as the former is calculated eminently to promote our well-being in this life, and the latter presents to our view the prospect of a happy immortality beyond the grave. It is a system of immutable truth founded on the Rock of Ages, which stands, and will stand a monument of glory till time shall be no more. It is an emanation from Him whose being is love. It illumines the world with beams of the purest light. Beyond all reasonable doubt, is the best gift of God to man, and worthy of the highest veneration.

AND WHY IS NOT THIS RELIGION FIRMLY BELIEVED IN, AND CORDIALLY EMBRACED BY ALL? Is it because mankind possess an innate aversion to truth—to moral purity? If it be even so, can it be true that men are prone to reject the hope of a happy hereafter? that they naturally spurn the consolations which flow from Christianity? However gross the ordinary depravity of mankind; however prone men are to “love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil,” it nevertheless cannot be doubted that thousands and millions who remain strangers to it, would, at once, and with all the heart, embrace this religion, had not sectarians by mixing with its genuine doctrines the unhallowed leaven of their own preposterous speculations and vile inventions, led them to distrust its divine origin—did not the example of its false professors cause them to question the felicitous moral tendency of its doctrines. In view of the monstrous perversions of the design, the absurd constructions of the letter, and egregious delinquences of its professed friends in living up to the

spirit and requirements, of the Christian theology, alas, what multitudes have been hurried into the mazes of scepticism, or precipitated into the abyss of infidelity! Though men so naturally incline to sin, wantonly rolling it as a sweet morsel under their tongues, and thus fall under the condemnation; yet the invitation extended to *all* to embrace this religion, (for God is no respecter of persons,) would, we have reason to believe, be far more frequently, perhaps almost universally, accepted with cordiality and joy wherever the Gospel is propagated, were the stumbling-blocks which unworthy professors have piled up in the way removed.

We are accustomed to hear *Voltaire* denounced by religious zealots, as having been in his day not only the great apostle of infidelity, but the very emissary and prime minister of satan himself. How often do we hear his name uttered with holy horror from the pulpit. But an acquaintance with the true history of the man, should incline, methinks, at least the liberal-minded to regard his case with some degree of pity and compassion. The following brief sketch of his history, affords a striking illustration of the truth of my position, as above stated.—“What made *Voltaire* an infidel? He was a deist, not an atheist, as he has been often represented, for in his works are to be found some of the most beautiful and convincing essays, showing the truth of the universal belief of all the wise nations of antiquity, and indeed of all nations, in the existence of an all wise, good and powerful creator of the universe. *Madame De Stael* in her work upon the French Revolution, abounding with enlightened and profound reflections, has told us how *Voltaire* became an infidel. He was reared about the time of the celebrated repeal of the edict of *Nantz*, the famous edict made by the Fourth *Henry* granting toleration to his protestant subjects. That edict was repealed by his grandson *Louis XIV.* and in the age of *Voltaire* the Calvinists of France were dying on the wheel, the gibbet, the rack and the stake, and fleeing from persecution by thousands and tens of thousands into exile. His youthful bosom burned with indignation against persecution, next against the bigots whose blind zeal kindled the flame, and finally against the religion, in whose prostituted name those horrible persecutions were perpetrated. From his youth to his old age, he maintained with all the energy of his mighty mind, a warfare with the priests and the altar, and the influence of his writings is now immeasurable. This is the account which the illustrious daughter of *Neckar* gives of *Voltaire's* infidelity,” &c.*

Protected as we are by the broad shield of our glorious Constitution, it is not indeed our lot to witness those horrible

*See *Dunlap's* defence of *Kneeland*, pp. 15, 16.

scenes of torture and bloodshed occasioned by the merciless spirit of persecution, which have been, with such lavish and cruel wantonness, such excessive infamy, displayed in the old world. Happily, in our age and country, religious intolerance has comparatively but very narrow limits in which it can exert its implacable rage. Let us fervently thank Heaven that we are spared from witnessing the sad and revolting spectacle, of victims miserably perishing on "the wheel, the gibbet, the rack and the stake." But if persecution is not suffered to ply its engines here, have we not enough persecutors *in spirits*, enough bigots, enough hypocrites, enough fanatics, to excite in the virtuous heart emotions of utter disgust? Is not religion sufficiently prostituted to bring it into disrepute? While it is made such a hack, such a hobby of selfishness as it is, is it aught surprising that such countless numbers doubt its reality, or lose all confidence in it?

Thus it will be seen, that one great reason why religion is not more extensively embraced, is the pernicious example of hypocrites, fanatics and bigots. But for this, with what eagerness would men seek the living wells of salvation! What multitudes more than now do, would truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and walk in conformity with his commands! On whom does the blame and responsibility chiefly devolve, and the condemnation rest with heaviest weight—on the blind, or the blind leaders of the blind?

I cannot but feel an irrepressible sympathy for those who are thus led to doubt the reality of religion.—Surely, after all, the principal ingredient of that unbelief which is so often spoken of in the pages of inspiration as the great and fatal sin of mankind, has its residence in the heart rather than in the understanding. Men shut their eyes against the light of truth, and wilfully hold what they know to be a lie in their right hand, because of the hardness of their hearts and the wickedness of their lives. But the unbelief which results from want of satisfactory evidence of the truth, or is implanted in the mind by the unworthy example of religious professors, is certainly far less criminal in its nature. It will, I humbly trust, be regarded by the great Judge of all, as a misfortune worthy of his compassion, rather than as a crime which demands the punishment of *eternal fire*. But unbelief, whatever may be its origin or character, is a wretched companion, and I sincerely pity those who have been forced into its precincts by witnessing the mockery which is made of the true faith. Infidelity tears away the last pillar of man's best and most glorious hope.

Of the two kinds of unbelief or infidelity, (if we are to use these terms as synonymous) the one may perhaps be appropriately called the infidelity of the head, and the other, the infidelity of the heart. Now it is truly unfortunate that the for-

mer, trifling, comparatively, as doubtless is its moral turpitude, is nevertheless far more difficult to cure than the latter. Let but conscience rouse from her sleep; let the arrows of remorse wing their way to *the heart*, and thenceforth we may hope that the progress of moral turpitude will be arrested in the veriest monster of depravity; that even that heart which is little better than a sink of pollution will become purified: and the convincing power of truth will be sure to accompany the renovating influence of the divine spirit. But let the prolific seeds of scepticism be unhappily sown in *the understanding*, and at once the root of unbelief will strike downward deep and fast, and its branches soar upward rank and strong; it will continue to germinate, to grow, to expand, in a constant series of production and re-production, cherished alike by the hand of powerful friends and of pretended foes, and continually self-fostered by the ardor of debate, by the strength of "reasoning pride," by the zeal of proselytism, by the vain but common ambition to vanquish opponents in the field of argument; till this prolific and poisonous upas of the mind has attained a vigor and ascendancy never to be uprooted or lopped of its branches.

It is not unfrequently the case, that the sceptic or unbeliever has a vivid perception of the beauty and excellence of the *moral* system which Christ inculcated, and profoundly admires and venerates the godlike spirit which pervades it. With this his heart is touched; and he would fain believe the Bible to be what it claims to be, the genuine and authentic word of God, and that Christ truly came on earth as the commissioned Teacher and great Saviour of the world. Like Agrippa, he is almost persuaded to be a christian. What hinders or restrains his faith? By what means, and by whose agency, have the materials of unbelief been collected in his mind? How has he been led, first to suspect, and finally to conclude that christianity is "a cunningly-devised fable?" Reading the works of deists, sceptics, free inquirers, had little agency in bringing his mind to the unwelcome result of doubt and unbelief. Nor was Voltaire or Volney, Paine or Palmer, Gibbon or Hume, Abner Kneeland or Fanny Wright, the principal pilot who conducted him to the frightful precipice on which he stands. These indeed may have beckoned him along; but words of a stronger twist than the most renowned champions of infidelity ever employed were fastened to him, and he was dragged onward by mightier hands than theirs. How stands his case? Let it be stated truly and impartially.—He has witnessed the weakness of superstition, and the preposterous extravagance of fanaticism; he has seen the baleful effects of bigotry and intolerance; he is wearied with the cant of hollow-hearted hypocrisy; he is disgusted with the selfishness and

juggles of priestcraft; he is shocked at the uncharitableness, the malignity, the everlasting feuds of sectarianism; and, in view of all, he with equal rashness and reluctance concludes that religion is either the chimerical dream of superstition, or a stupendous and imposing fraud, invented and upheld to subserve the interests of designing men. Hence his infidelity is not the result of choice, but necessity. He would not willingly shut his eyes against light, nor reject the evidence of truth; he seeks not a refuge in falsehood; for he is not prompted so to do by the consciousness of a bad life. To whom is his unbelief chargeable? In his inquiries after truth, he meant to be honest; but those who professed to hold it in their hands had corrupted it, had degraded it, had sold it for gain, had rendered it an object of suspicion. Can it be matter of surprise then, if he be unable to discover any loveliness in that which has been thus dishonored, thus rendered an object of odium and distrust?

CHAPTER II.

CONTENTS.—Religion in its purity strongly recommends itself to universal respect. Why so many oppose religion, or regard it with indifference. Notwithstanding it is the example of self-righteous hypocrites which make so many infidels, they are always exclaiming against them, and judging them worthy of hell torments. The undeniable excellence of the christian morality. The evidence in support of the truth of christianity ought to be satisfactory to all. It ought not to be rejected on account of its having been perverted. Honest men, misled by bigotry and ignorance, are frequently found to advocate the most absurd doctrines. The great diversity of religious opinions and the cause of it. Why so many know not what to believe. Creeds and commentaries have little profited the cause of truth. Good men may err in opinion, and differ in sentiment from each other, but a similarity exists in regard to their moral virtues and pious feelings. We should be liberal towards those who honestly differ from us in opinion. After due examination, we should be firm in the truth; but such firmness does not imply bigotry. The absurd course taken by the bigot. The false impressions of some in regard to the bigotry, &c. of the present ædy.

Pure religion is a rational, consistent principle, productive of every good work, and uniformly exhibits itself in the life and deportment of its professor. It is an ornament which he wears every day; not a beautiful cloak for mere Sunday use. Its attractions are therefore irresistible, and it powerfully recommends itself to universal respect and esteem. Separate religion from all alloy, that men may behold its pure and heavenly luster, and can we suppose it would as frequently as it

now does meet with opposition? Can it be doubted that people would more generally believe in its reality, admire its beauty, be convinced of its transcendent importance, and cordially embrace it?

We often hear the complaint, that people are too apt to neglect religion. That multitudes, if they do not oppose, regard it with indifference. Undoubtedly this is the case. But what is the principal cause of this indifference and neglect? Who can wonder that religion languishes for want of friends? that its reputation is at so low an ebb? and this notwithstanding the fashionable religious excitements which are mechanically got up, and other artificial means which are resorted to, in order to gain proselytes, and to strengthen the hands of the clergy. So long as religion is environed with so many disparaging circumstances, it cannot be expected to win many true lovers.

Thus, I repeat, it is to the false friends of religion—to the odious examples of hypocrites, that we are to ascribe a great proportion of the infidelity which prevails. And yet, with what vehemence, what burning zeal, will these self-righteous hypocrites exclaim against infidels! with what venom will they asperse and hunt down their character! how piously consign their souls to eternal perdition! when it is the rotten example of such very hypocrites, which has made them infidels whom they thus slander and denounce.

It may not be improper in this place to remark, that the superior excellence of the Christian *morality* is demonstrative, not only by a comparison of it with every other system of ethics which has been introduced by philosophers, Jewish lawgivers, pretended prophets, and others, but by the *effect* it produces on the character of those who live up to its spirit. The lives of such will invariably be seen a beautiful exemplification of every amiable and exalted virtue. I would also remark, that the evidence in proof of the *divine origin* of the Christian religion is such as ought to be satisfactory to all, notwithstanding all that has been done by hypocrites and others to impair confidence in its truth.

Let not, then, the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ be rejected, through prejudice imbibed from the fact of its having been perverted. I repeat it, Christianity is of inestimable value, for it imparts unequalled blessings in this life, and holds forth the transcendently glorious prospect of endless unalloyed felicity in another. Its unrivalled purity and sublimity as a moral code, are admitted even by many who question its divine origin. Let it be separated from the false teachings of men; let the superstition, the bigotry and hypocrisy which have so deeply stained its credit be done away; let it be seen in its native and divine beauty, and, I fondly trust, there are few indeed but

would love and reverence it. Its principles, and its claim to our belief, ought surely to receive at our hands an impartial and thorough examination.

Honest men even, as well as selfish sectarians, have often been found to advocate religious doctrines grossly absurd; and this through sheer ignorance, not having duly examined those tenets which they have embraced, but received a sectarian system in the mass, generally that which they have been taught to believe in early life. And (such is the weakness of many) they suffer their prepossessions to impress them with the belief that it would be an unpardonable heresy, if not a renunciation of christianity itself, to call in question any doctrine or article of faith which their sect maintains as essential. Their minds are effectually barred against the light of free inquiry and restricted within the narrow bounds which bigotry perscribes.

What a diversity of religious opinions mankind have embraced? Imposters, visionary enthusiasts, and speculative theologians have filled the world with creeds. Such is the result produced by the unhallowed ambition of sectarists, the ignorance of fanatics, and of learned divines. No wonder that so many are bewildered in the mazes of error and uncertainty, and know not what to believe. Amid all this confusion of conflicting opinions, they can discover no certain land marks of truth, and in the end they conclude that all religion is but the cunning device of interested men, or the idle fantasy of the imagination. They abandon all religious inquiry as vain, cease to respect revelation itself, and become confirmed, though perhaps not avowed, infidels.

Theological writers in general, with all their parade of learning, and claims of having been divinely assisted, have, alas! done little or nothing to elucidate truth. Pin your faith on the sleeve of one, or of all the eminent of one sect; and what do you more or less than passively submit to the chains of bigotry? if bigotry consists in a blind and obstinate devotion to error and absurdity. Spurn the shackles of bigotry, and take a peep at the doctrines of different sect; and you are in great danger of becoming involved in doubt and uncertainty—from the Babel in which you have placed yourself, it will be wonderful indeed if your transit to scepticism and infidelity is not sure. Were nineteen-twentieths of the learned lumber of biblical commentators together with the wretched rhapsodies of addeleated dreamers, consigned to the flames, and the scriptures left to the plain good sense of mankind, what huge masses of error would be at once annihilated! With monstrous, absurd and contradictory creeds, we should no longer be burdened and embarrassed. Truth would be restored to its own simple standard, neither liable to be entangled and lost in the endless labyrinth of theological controversy, nor obscured by mystic or meta-

physical confusion. But now we are literally flooded with religious theories; while at the same time, it is to be feared that pure, practical piety is almost as rare as righteousness was in ancient Sodom.

Whoever would search after truth, will find it of little use to resort to creeds and commentaries. He would be ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. It is happy to reflect that we have at hand a surer guide to direct us—the volume of inspiration. Profiting by its salutary instructions, and actuated by an honest zeal to discover truth, we may hope that our researches will be attended with success.

But, after all, good men may embrace speculative errors, for their minds are liable to be misled; though all good men will have similar devotional feelings and virtuous sentiments of heart: thus far, to whatever sect or persuasion they may belong, they are cordially united as one. The consideration that even the best of men are liable to error and delusion, should dispose us to liberality towards those who honestly differ from us in opinion. That, however, is a false liberality which compromises with what is notoriously erroneous. We ought to stand firm for the true faith which Christ delivered to his followers. Real christians may disagree in matters of religion; but such of the leading principles of christianity as are so plain as not to be liable to mistake, it were impious to compromise or abandon. Let unquestionable truth be manfully vindicated. When gross absurdity, or rank “infidelity stares us in the face, we are not to mince and qualify.” Let us then assume that most honorable of all courage, the boldness of principle. But how different is this from dogmatism and bigotry! The bigot never discusses with candor, or acknowledges that any argument which his opponent brings forward has the least weight; he never suffers his mind to be open to conviction; or deigns to inquire whether it may not be possible that the presumed heterodox tenets of his neighbors are in accordance with the Bible; but positive of the correctness of his own, he is obstinately determined to vindicate their infallibility. Now it is not so with the candid and consistent christian. He examines with care, embraces with caution, respects the honest opinions of all, persecutes none, acknowledges that all have a right to their opinions, and extends liberality and fellowship so far as christian fidelity will warrant, but no further. His motto is, “Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.”

I shall frequently have occasion, in the course of my strictures, to speak of bigotry, superstition, hypocrisy, priestcraft, &c.; convinced that it is proper and expedient to expose their deformities to the public gaze. There are those who would persuade us that these things have scarce a being at the pres-

ent day; or if they have, that they are to be found in the custody of those only who belong to a different denomination from their own. Such persons would have us think that the bare mention of superstition, priestcraft, &c., savors of infidelity, and evinces hostility to religion! If you touch *Orthodox*, you are an infidel! It is easy to see how far such persons are interested in disguising facts. Never, perhaps, was religion more grossly perverted and contaminated than at the present day. And this is the case not only at a distance from us, and among those whom we consider notorious heretics, hypocrites, and imposters, but also among ourselves—we have set up false gods within our own doors.

CHAPTER III.

CONTENTS.—False liberality. Sometimes not only a weakness but a crime. Illustrated by a supposed case. In religious inquiries, we are freely to exercise our reason. It is not the design of revelation to confound us with mysteries, but to explain mysteries. Some exclaim against the use of “carnal reason,” and want people to receive religious doctrines implicitly from the hands of their teachers, without gain-saying or inquiry. Otherwise they are tainted with infidelity! The Unitarians accused of atheism. How the term “freethinker,” has become synonymous, in common acceptation, with infidel, atheist, &c. The right and propriety of exercising reason in matters of religious inquiry, argued. The free exercise of our reasoning faculties the only way to throw off the manacles which superstition and bigotry impose. Deep-rooted prejudices and long-established errors. Opinions not to be discarded merely for their antiquity. Innovators and inventors of new-fangled doctrines. How to proceed in our researches after truth. The absurd method adopted by many. Not safe to take a survey of the lumber and rubbish of the various superstitions of the world, until, by intelligent inquiry, we have become established in the principles of truth. Truth not to be rejected because it may be found incorporated with error. All good men agree as to the great principles of moral truth and duty. Explanatory note. In relation to matters of faith, close and careful examination is necessary. We are not bound to take even the truth of the bible for granted, without examination. More profitable to consult the bible than to appeal to learned human authority. The language of scripture plain and explicit, and easy to be understood. Christ’s sermon on the mount an illustration of this fact. Conscience and common sense the best interpreters of the divine law, except only the holy Spirit operating on the heart and understanding. Learned harangues and dissertations generally serve to darken and perplex people’s minds, rather than answer any valuable purpose. Learning an instrument of evil in the hands of certain sectarian teachers. Better to learn our moral duties from the bible, than to wrangle about doctrines. Remarks respecting heresy. Why some people are always crying out “heresy!” How heresies originate. Allusion to a certain class who would starve upon truth.

However liberality and candor are to be ranked among the

most amiable christian virtues, they are nevertheless susceptible of degeneracy, and may become vices. When blasphemous infidelity, when soul-chilling atheism shows its horrid front, or grossly absurd superstition its ridiculous visage, it ill becomes us to lavish our courtesies either on the one or the other. I know no reason why calculating and systematic falsehood should be touched with tenderness; much less should we, in the plentitude of our liberality, extend to it our fellowship. Opinions palpably erroneous, and doctrines notoriously, *nakedly* preposterous, it is our duty to endeavor to explode. The individual who shrinks from an open, manly encounter with that which is clearly wrong, has but little integrity, moral courage, or independence of mind. Suppose, for instance, a man shall witness the arts and progressive usurpations of a crafty clergy; that he shall be convinced that the ringleaders of the order are aiming to establish a priestly domination over the people, whereby the clergy may better succeed in extorting money from them, in order to live in laziness and splendor; that he shall see all the various machinery put in motion to enlarge the influence of the clerical order—see the wily manœuvres of the principal managers—see them and their subordinates assiduously inculcating among the ignorant and unsuspecting portion of the people a system of gross and gloomy superstition pretendedly deduced from the bible, with the view to conceal their real object from the public observation, make them dupes subservient to their designs, divest their attention, and keep their minds in darkness and delusion, in trammels and in awe;—would it not be a culpable dereliction of duty—would it not betray an ignoble pusillanimity of spirit—would it not discover a reckless disregard to the welfare and dearest interests of the community, should the man who saw and knew all this, fold his arms in utter listlessness, or fear to let a single syllable escape his lips or pen lest he fall under the ban of sacerdotal displeasure, or be branded with the opprobrious appellation of *infidel*? Most assuredly it would.

Whatever may be pretended to the contrary, it is obviously right and proper to bring religious questions to the test of reason and common sense. True, there are doctrines in the christian theology which seem beyond the power of human reason to comprehend. Revelation also discloses many things which our unassisted reason could never have discovered. And much of the bible may be beyond *my* ability to comprehend, that is perfectly plain to others. But it is quite improbable that the sacred volume, expressly designed as it is by Heaven for our instruction in relation to our present duty and our future destiny, should yet contain such inexplicable mysteries as totally stagger and confound all human reason. God hath given us a revelation, not to confound us with mysteries,

but to explain mysteries, and render them intelligible to our reason and understanding. But though much of the bible be *above* mere human reason, or at least the comprehension of ordinary minds, it may be safely affirmed that not a sentence, not a syllable of it is *against* reason. But many of the manufactured systems of divinity in vogue at the present day, are, more or less, grossly inconsistent with every dictate of reason and common sense: I therefore feel justified in rejecting them, in so far as they disagree therewith.

There are those who say, “*you must not reason*—you must not exercise your *carnal reason* in matters of faith—you must not question the truth of those fundamental doctrines denominated *orthodox*, which you are to receive implicitly from the hands of the clergy, without inquiry or gainsaying. Good orthodox ministers pronounce them bible doctrines, and they must be right, for they have great learning, and not only understand Hebrew, Greek and Latin, but have also found out many of God’s secret decrees, and can interpret his will much more clearly than he has seen fit to reveal it!” I know not whether such would not also have the bible itself withheld from the laity, as has heretofore been sometimes done in those countries where priestcraft reigned in full triumph. Certain priests might find such an arrangement quite convenient; but as they rightly conclude it would be rather difficult to carry such an arrangement into effect, their next recourse is, to endeavor to abridge the freedom of inquiry and prohibit the exercise of reason. They want everybody to believe the bible in just such sense as they are pleased to explain it in; and all who do not, forsooth, are tainted with *infidelity*. This is not mere assertion. I appeal to facts. For instance, have they not accused the Unitarian denomination even of *atheism*, because that class of christians disbelieve in **THREE** Gods? And do they not attach to “free thinking”—to every instance of claim to the right of opinion upon theological questions which comes under their observation, all the odium of infidelity they can possibly make stick, and affect to regard the merest doubt as to the infallible truth of a single article of faith which the “orthodox” creed considers as essential, as an evidence that he who thus dares to doubt, is “in the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity?”

By the way, how come the term “freethinker” to be synonymous, in popular usage, with infidel, atheist, &c. ? We need not weary ourselves in searching for an answer to the question. “Orthodoxy” would fain prohibit free inquiry and free discussion, or the exercise of our reasoning faculties, in matters of religion; “you must not reason, you must not presume to think freely—if you do, you are an infidel, an atheist,” &c. This fallacy has been so plausibly and continually insinuated,

in order to deter men from the exercise of reason and free inquiry, that, at length, people have been brought to believe that freethinker and infidel mean unavoidably one and the same thing. Thus evidence rests on the very face of the term "freethinker," with the spurious definition which has been artfully and surreptitiously annexed to it by our orthodox infallibles, that their aim is, to cast obloquy and reproach on those who indulge in freedom of thought, in order effectually to restrain its exercise. Let it not be urged, with an air of triumphant reply, that "freethinker" is the soft and deceptive appellation which the Wrights and Owens of the day have themselves adopted. This is true; but the admission by no means goes to overthrow my argument. For it is also true, that the name has been applied, not simply in its true literal import, but as implying a disbelief in christianity, and, indeed, as implying all the odious characteristics of infidelity, to men who hold real infidelity in utter abhorrence, and solely because they claimed the right of free discussion and inquiry, touching matters of mere sectarian belief.

Here I would ask—Is it probable, or possible, that reason, that noblest faculty of man; that faculty which distinguishes him from the brutal creation; that faculty, the possession of which affords the strongest moral evidence of the immortality of his being; which enables him to investigate the laws of nature, and explore the recondite depths of science, and not only to extend his thoughts to the contemplation of the most glorious works of the Almighty, but to form some conception, faint and limited indeed, of the eternal attributes of Deity;—I would ask, is it probable, or possible, that this sublimest faculty of the human intellect was given to man under an interdiction that it should never be exercised, in the investigation of those truths which are infinitely important for him to understand aright? Is it not more probable, that the author of our being especially designed that this high gift should be actively employed by us, in searching after that true wisdom which transcends all worldly knowledge in importance? Is reason to be exercised in relation to temporal concerns, so comparatively trifling, and yet in relation to the great concerns of eternity, is its exercise to be altogether suspended? But I need say no more on this head. Those who are willing to forego the exercise of reason in matters of religion, even in compliance with the pious admonitions of the orthodox clergy, are willing to become fools, and to be led blindfold into every absurdity: such are the fit tools and panders of a designing priesthood. For one, I am neither willing nor ready to pin my faith on the ministerial sleeve, but would choose rather to judge for myself.

Let us then fearlessly bring all questions of religious faith

to the ordeal of reason; and thus endeavor to throw off the manacles of error, superstition and bigotry. It is long enough that these have shackled the human mind—cramped its freedom—depressed its moral energies—sunk it in ignorance—incapacitated it for inquiry—filled it with a thousand idle and terrific phantoms, and corrupted and debased whatever may have been pure, or noble, or exalted in the natural emotions and sensibilities of the heart. Let us dare to pursue an independent course, without servilely treading in the footsteps of others. Until we have examined for ourselves, let us pledge our support to no creed whatever, be its popularity or its pretensions to orthodoxy what they may. The human mind has a right to think for itself, and ought not to be fettered by this or that sectarian system, arrogantly claiming infallibility. The advocates of this abridgement of mental freedom are the worst of tyrants. Why should we permit ourselves to be awed or misled by them from the path of our duty? Let revelation be our guide, let reason be our faithful servant at all times; but let the mere *say so* of creed-makers and creed-mongers be *no more than duly valued*.

In removing deep-rooted prejudices and long-established errors, the process may be slow; but, if we persevere, they will finally melt away before the increasing rays which glance from intelligent inquiry. Perish, therefore, those weak and injurious scruples which have so often deterred men from an examination of that system of belief which, from its long and extensive prevalence, has come to be regarded as too sacred to be touched by human hand. Though bigots deem it impiety, let self-styled orthodoxy be boldly put to the crucible.

Long-received opinions, it is true, are not to be discarded *because* of their antiquity; neither is any tenet to be rejected simply for its being found incorporated in a creed which we deem heterodox. Innovators, and inventors of new-fangled doctrines, are generally more distinguished for their affected singularity of opinions, their crude hypotheses, and chimerical notions, than for any enlightened and consistent views. The authority of great names and of respectable creeds is entitled to deference, except in so far as it sanctions error. But whatever may be said to the contrary, it certainly cannot be presumptuous to examine with the utmost scrutiny, any doctrine or system of doctrines extant, however and by whomsoever regarded as infallibly true; and if conviction be the result, that such doctrine or system is erroneous, it is our duty to reject it without hesitation.

In our researches after truth, it is necessary first of all to divest our minds as much as possible of all prepossessions. Let us next avail ourselves of the best lights to direct us, namely, revelation and reason. Let us endeavor to analyze every subject of our inquiry, and weigh with impartiality and

precision whatever evidence is suggested for our contemplation, whether in favor of, or militating against, the truth of any particular proposition. Is this method too tedious? We ought to be willing to dig deep—to search diligently after truth; and it is better, though it cost as much pains, to arrive at one certain truth, and to be able to vindicate it as such, than to become familiar with a thousand errors, though with the utmost facility.

This method of ascertaining truth is very different from that which is pursued by many, who, fettered by tradition and a false education, or misled by popular example, blindly and unscrupulously embrace, with little or no examination, all the doctrines in the mass pertaining to some certain system or “body of divinity,” perchance equally huge, incomprehensible, incongruous and absurd. Such is the course ordinarily pursued, not only by the ignorant, but also by the learned, who, having as blindly embraced their creed, avail themselves, if subsequently pressed by necessity, of the testimony of tradition, or the *say so* evidence of great writers, and apply their *metaphysics* with all the dexterity of schoolmen, in the attempt to vindicate their creed, explain away its absurdities, and reconcile its inconsistencies. How preferable is plain good sense, to the perverted and perplexing metaphysics of the modern theological school!

Having by intelligent and honest inquiry, become established in the principles of truth, we may with safety, though not without disgust, take a survey of the lumber and rubbish of superstition, incorporated with the multitude of different creeds with which the world is encumbered. But before we have adopted a rational system of our own, in which we have good reason to have confidence, such extensive survey would be dangerous; for in all probability we should become so perplexed with various opinions, as never to be able to separate error from truth; at least it would tend to obstruct, rather than to aid and facilitate, the progress of investigation.

If in examining *any* creed, we find but two grains of wheat, though amidst much chaff, let us not throw them away. As there is not the least probability that the creed of any denomination is correct in all its articles, so it is altogether improbable that the creed of any denomination, professedly founded on the basis of christianity, is erroneous throughout. Truth, though its beams have been widely diffused, has been everywhere more or less obscured by the clouds of error. And though it were injudicious, in our primary search for its principles, to listen to the jarring opinions of mankind, or to toil through the learned tomes of various commentators, differing in opinion, yet truth is truth, and should be recognized and acknowledged wherever found.

All good men will be found to agree, in reference to the great principles of moral truth and duty;* for here there can be no mistake. The God of nature has so strongly impressed those principles upon the heart and conscience, and so loudly proclaimed them to our understanding, that our natural affections and faculties must have become depraved and perverted indeed, if we do not love their purity, and see and walk by their light. But in relation to matters of faith, the case is quite different. Here we are to examine with care, and form our opinions on mature consideration. It is even necessary that we should examine what claim to authenticity the Christian religion itself has; for unless we are satisfied, by investigation, of the validity of such claim, our faith is but the result of education, or of some casual circumstance or combination of circumstances, and liable to be blown away by the breath of infidelity. That living evidence which the Divine Spirit brings home with power to the heart, is, most undoubtedly, the best and most valuable of all evidence of the truth of Christianity; but, until that happy attainment is arrived at, it is our obvious duty to seek after the evidences of truth in a way level with our ability, and humbly hope for spiritual evidence, rather than presumptuously calculate upon it. The revealings of the spirit we are not to regard as an ordinary privilege; and those even who think they have received this kind of evidence, are liable to be altogether mistaken; their whole strength of faith is, alas, but too frequently the mere impulse of superstition, or the effect of tradition. We ought to be able to vindicate our belief by arguments of reason. We are not bound, nor is it judicious, to take the Bible itself, as true, on mere assumption. Without reasonable evidence of its divine or-

*I allude to natural religion—to the common principles of moral virtue,—justice, prudence, sobriety, fortitude, all the ordinary virtues of humanity, including, with some qualification, piety and philanthropy. The sublime and super-human principles of moral duty inculcated in many of the precepts of the Saviour, (the following precept for example,—“But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you,”—) could never have been revealed by the mere dictates of conscience, or light of nature. How immeasurable is the superiority of the Christian morality compared with the morality taught by Socrates, Seneca, Plato, Confucius, or any other philosopher of ancient or modern times! If, in regard to the principles of common morality or natural religion, there has existed any material difference of opinion, it has been between individuals belonging to one or the other of the three following classes of people, namely: *speculative writers*, who figure only in cold abstractions, or amuse themselves in building up artificial hypotheses; *metaphysical casuists*, who very scrupulously lean as interest, caprice, or prejudice dictates: and *visionary sentimentalists*, who, like Rousseau, strain their ideas of virtue to a tone too sublimated for practical use, or so refine upon moral distinctions that they become *indistinct*, and “no man can tell what virtue is.”

igin, why should I believe it sooner than I should the Koran, the Talmud, or the Shaster? For one, I am fully convinced that the bible is a divinely inspired book; a conviction resulting from no little examination of its claims to that character. Arguments in proof of its authenticity may be drawn from innumerable sources, and, to every mind not barred against the light of the clearest evidence, they must be conclusive. Yet into such disrepute have the false professors of Christianity brought even the bible itself, that it has become the especial duty of its real believers to defend its truth. Were it, indeed, of a character such as any one unacquainted with its inimitable system of morality and its incontestible claims to authenticity, would naturally suppose it to be, judging from the pernicious and selfish use so often made of it, and from the irrational and horrible doctrines which its false friends have pretended to deduce from it, it ought to be rejected at once and forever. Can it be aught surprising that infidelity so abounds?

Let people read the bible, and understand as much of it as they are able, without inquiring what this learned theologian's opinion is, or what the decision of that council or synod was; what this creed maintains, or that expositor says. The commands and great leading principles of the Gospel are so simple, plain and explicit, that "he who runs may read" and understand them. For example: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Mat. 22. 37, 38, 39. Again: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Mat. 7. 12. The language of these texts is clear and concise, and may be easily understood by the most ordinary capacity; and so of as many more of Christ's commands as any one will be found ready and willing to obey. Read his sermon on the mount: all is plain and explicit and easy to be understood, without mystery or ambiguity, unequalled in sublimity and inimitable in beauty, and pathetically and irresistibly appeals to the heart and the understanding in testimony of its truth. Did he "who spake as never man spake," adopt a language so unintelligible, as to require the aid of critics, commentators, metaphysicians, to make it rightly understood? Next to the Divine Spirit enlightening the understanding and leading the heart aright, I believe that conscience and common sense are the best interpreters of the divine law. Through the medium of these I believe that truth oftener visits the understanding and comes home with power to the heart, than through the channel of the learned harangues and dissertations so much in fashion at the present day. It would seem the design of certain sectarian teachers, to render mystery still more mysterious,

and so to confuse and bewilder people's minds with their imposing sophistries and subtil speculations, as to render them incapable of judging for themselves. Let me be rightly understood—I would not decry the legitimate, but the pernicious use of learning. When our learned divines industriously hunt up every passage in scripture in any degree ambiguous or obscure, and apply such construction thereto as will favor their particular creed and preconceived notions, regardless of the true spirit and meaning; when they employ their specious rhetoric and bewildering metaphysics to bolster up some unreasonable and monstrous doctrine; when their explanations serve to darken rather than to elucidate obscure passages of scripture, and to build up ten absurdities as often as they solve one question involved in difficulty; when they prostitute their erudition to the unhallowed cause of establishing sectarian sentiments, and misapply their eloquence in propagating them; when they avail themselves of all the learning they possess to aid them in their heated disputations with religious opponents, in which the strife is too often for the mastery, or something worse—to advance the growth, or to maintain the ascendancy, of their sect, rather than to secure the triumph of truth;—when learning is thus perverted, instead of a blessing to mankind and an auxiliary to true religion, it proves a serious injury to both.

How easy is it, if they are so minded, for men to learn their duty from the bible! If they would read one chapter only—that in which St. Paul gives us a description of *charity*, and would learn to practice that first of christian virtues, how much more profitable would it be them, than to wrangle and contend about doctrines! It has most generally been the practice of those who seek to gain proselytes to their own sect, to warp and twist every passage of scripture which wou'd seem to favor the doctrines of their creed, in order to weave a web to their own liking. But with all their superabundance of sectarian zeal, how little are they zealous of good works! In arguing doctrines, they have learned to split hairs with admirable dexterity. But were it not more consonant with their professed character as christians, to let alone religious disputes, and instead thereof, turn their attention to the great principles of moral duty?

From time to time, we hear an almost deafening cry about heresy; but they who join in the clamor, are usually themselves the greatest heretics. Different sects are for ever accusing each other of embracing heresies. And why should they not? since nothing is more common than for Satan to rebuke sin. Now what is the origin of the host of heresies with which the world is overwhelmed? Evidently they derive their birth from the ignorance of the multitude, and the selfish craft of those who for gain contrive to manage the multitude. The

one class, it is well known, are always prepared to swallow the grossest absurdities ; and the other class are not less ready to wrest the scriptures from their obvious and natural meaning, in order to support doctrines the most absurd and inconsistent with reason. This latter class would starve upon *truth*, sooner than they would even upon a Graham system of diet ; but as they would have a plenty of “loaves and fishes,” they take to telling *fish-stories*, not forgetting to give their discourse an occasional sprinkling with the essence of brimstone!

CHAPTER IV.

CONTENTS.—Sectarians not only misquote and misinterpret the Bible, but make additions to it. Notice of the passage in 1 John, 5. 7: *There are three that bear record in Heaven, &c.* To make proselytes, sectarians try to flatter and scare people. A list of passages in the New Testament, respecting false teachers and false doctrines. No wonder that, at this day, sectarianism so abounds, &c.

It is not enough, it would seem, that sectarians, in order to make the bible sanction doctrines of the grossest bigotry and superstition, have warped, and twisted, and mangled and misquoted scripture, in instances innumerable; but they have had the effrontery to go much further than this in their impositions. They have not scrupled to make additions and interpolations to the sacred volume, whenever any exigency required them to do so! This is a broad accusation, but facts sustain it. For instance; we read that Christ is the Saviour of *all* men, especially of those who believe; but our good orthodox teachers tell us that this *all* is *not all*, but only a *part*—thus altering or adding to the text. Alterations and additions, of some single word or member of a sentence, so seemingly trivial as to pass very often undetected by the multitude, but in reality most important, as varying essentially the meaning, are not unfrequently made. In discourses from the pulpit, and in printed treatises, alterations and additions of this kind may indeed be seldom hazarded; but in private conversation, where responsibility is less, how frequently is either some undesired word slyly expunged from a quoted text, some variation made of the reading, or some convenient word to sustain a favorite doctrine, surreptitiously added! To prove the doctrine of three Gods, eo-equal in sovereignty, power and glory, the orthodox clergy have seldom any hesitation in bringing forward the noted passage found in the first book of John, ch. 5, v. 7, to wit: “*There are three that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one.*”

This they do notwithstanding “the learned of the present day, throughout the religious world, have agreed, after a long and laborious examination, in pronouncing it no part of the original scriptures.”* Our Orthodox ministers are not ignorant of this fact; and yet, so anxious are they to maintain, if possible, by all and every means, their favorite doctrine of a plurality of Gods, that they are continually bringing forward this unquestionably spurious verse, with an air of triumph, as though it put every doubt as to the truth of their doctrine, completely at rest. Knowing that the passage constitutes the main pillar of that absurd doctrine, they would by no means expose and dishonor the *pious fraud* which fabricated it by lisping any surmise to their hearers, that their grand pillar of reliance has an intrinsic and fatal defect! They know too they can quote the passage both with safety and success; since not one perhaps, out of an hundred of their hearers, know aught to the contrary but that it is genuine scripture. Thus they bring up false scripture to prove their doctrine, which is the same thing as adding to the bible.

To such lengths will the sectarian go, in his zeal to maintain his creed. But, to uphold his sect and help it along, he resorts to other means, than this system of fraud and deception. He must need try what virtue there is in flattering some, and frightening others! He who believes in his creed (good works are superfluous!) will be saved, and he who believes it not will be damned. Of course, in his view, a vast majority of mankind will be inevitably consigned to endless misery—because they have not got good orthodox heads! And the torments they are to suffer to all eternity, will be inflicted by those same fallen angels by whose influence it was they were prevented from believing!

How aptly is the sectarian characterized by the apostle Paul: “Having a form of godliness,” (or creed,) “but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts.” 2 Tim. 3. 6, 7. And in another passage he assures us, that “the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned. From which some have

*Multitudes of the most distinguished *Trinitarians* have been obliged to give up to this passage as an interpolation. Dr. Middleton, Wardlaw, Bishop Lowth, Griesbach, and many others equally distinguished for their learning, considered the passage as spurious. So also did Sir Isaac Newton, Grotius, Heber, Dr. Adam Clarke, &c. &c. Rev. Henry Ware, Jr., whose language I have quoted above, further observes, that “all who are most competent to judge, Trinitarians as well as Unitarians, with one voice, and with scarcely any reserve, declare it to be an unauthorized addition to the Epistle of John.”

swerved, having turned aside to vain jangling." 1 Tim. 1. 5, 6. He admonishes christian believers to "be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." Eph. 4. 14. Again, he exhorts and notifies them as follows: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." Rom. 16. 17, 18. Other passages of a like import frequently occur in the New Testament; and although those which I have already quoted are amply sufficient for my purpose, and it would seem superfluous to add more, it will not be unprofitable I think, to swell the list, that the reader may see how oft and how pointedly the scriptures speak of false teachers and false doctrines. I will therefore transcribe several passages of similar import.—"Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Mat. 15. 6 to 9. Speaking of the Pharisees, Christ says in the same chapter, "They be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." In the next chapter, Christ cautions his disciples to beware of the leaven of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Paul's writings abound in passages of this kind. "But there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ." Gal. 1. 7. "Let no man deceive you with vain words." Eph. 5. 6. "Some indeed preach Christ of envy and strife." Phil. 1. 15. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world are ye subject to ordinances, (touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish in the using) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship," &c. Col. 2. 20 to 23. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron." 1 Tim. 4. 1 & 2. "But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness." 1 Tim. 4. 7. "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of

words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself." 1 Tim. 6. 3, 4, 5. "Of these put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers." 2 Tim. 2. 14. "But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes." v. 23. "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." 2 Tim. 3. 13. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." 2 Tim. 4. 3, 4. "For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.—Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men that turn from the truth.—They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." Tit. 1. 10, 11, 13, 14, 16. "But avoid foolish questions and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain." Tit. 3. 9. "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines." Heb. 13. 9. The other apostles also, frequently write to the same effect. "But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts glory not, and lie not against the truth." James, 3. 14. "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies," &c. "And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you." 2 Pet. 2. 1, 2, 3. He goes on to speak of such imposters:—"Presumptuous are they, self-willed," &c., 10. "Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceiving, while they feast with you." "A heart they have exercised with covetous practices," 13 & 14. "For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error," 18. Speaking of Paul's epistles, Peter observes that there are in them "some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." 2 Pet. 3. 16. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of

God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." 1 John, 4. 1.

And now, reader, would you have believed it, that the New Testament had so much to say respecting false teachers and false doctrines? Nor have I even now quoted all the passages on the subject. False doctrines had already become so multiplied, so rank in their growth; sectarianism so abounded on every side, in the very age of the introduction of christianity, as to require such strong and repeated rebuke at the hands of the apostles. Can it then be matter of wonder, that, after a lapse of eighteen centuries, the world should be overrun with false doctrines? that, at this day, *three hundred different sects and persuasions* should each one claim itself to be the true Christian church? that all manner of error, superstition and absurdity should have crept into their several creeds? that in fine, religion has been, and now is, so grossly perverted and abused?

Thus, men have departed from the simplicity of the Gospel; and, in their blind and intemperate zeal to build up sectarianism, they have neglected to cherish and inculcate those moral virtues and duties of life, which are the vital constituents of christianity. Now who, but the enemies of truth, have sown the tares of false doctrine? Deliberate and designing enemies to the truth have not, indeed, done all the mischief; for much is to be attributed to ignorance and blindness of mind. Yet so prodigious a crop of tares could never have grown to such excess, under the hand of honest inquiry.

CHAPTER V.

CONTENTS.—The custom of one sect to rail against other sects, in order to build itself up. Systems of superstition the devise of selfish priests. When one system has grown out of date, another is substituted. New systems introduced under the pretence of *reform*. The leaders of different sects, though they wrangle about tenets, pursue a common policy, and unite together in carrying out their grand plot of deception. Illustrated by historical facts. Our orthodox champions cannot get along without a pope and devil.

It has always been the practice of setarian zealots, to endeavor to establish their own creed by decrying that of other people. They would build on others' defects. This appears to have been the case with most or all of those who have ever separated themselves from the existing established, or ascendant sect. They will impute every absurdity in doctrine, and

every enormity in practice, to the church from which they separate. They will describe that church as the mystical Babylon and Mother of Harlots. "Come out of her, and be no longer partaker of her plagues," is their usual solemn admonition, in bible language, to those whom they seek to draw from the faith they are zealous to explode, in order to give them a better opportunity to erect a system of their own. Take their word for it, *they* alone imitate the apostles ! *They* have gone back to the original simplicity of the people !

In order to lay the foundation of their policy and power deep and strong, it has ever been the business of selfish priests, to devise such systems of superstition and delusion as appeared to promise most success, in the accomplishment of their design. And whenever the good sense of mankind has, in the progress of human knowledge, been enabled to penetrate the veil of mystery and darkness in which a prevailing system of superstition is enveloped, and such system cannot longer be sustained, but is in imminent danger of being utterly exploded, its absurdities ridiculed, and all its appendages thrown by as rubbish, it then becomes indispensably necessary that the inexhaustible resources of priestcraft be put in requisition, to modify it in such manner that it will better answer the purpose of delusion. If the old system has become extremely odious and ridiculous, in the popular estimation, it must undergo a thorough revision. Now those who undertake to modify the old system, or to invent a new one, know how to arrogate to themselves the credit, and to husband the advantage, of being considered *reformers*. Of course, they will be the first and loudest in decrying those absurdities which have gone out of fashion. They would persuade you, that NOW religion shines forth in all its perfect glory ; that the heresies of former times are done away ; that the church is purged of false doctrines. All this serves to blind and amuse the unsuspecting multitude ; no one will dream that all these pretences are only for the purpose of carrying on a system of deception, and of course, proselytes will rapidly multiply. Thus it is the business of priestcraft, not only to cherish superstition, and promote sectarianism, but its champions are the very authors and founders of both.

The policy of the ringleaders of priestcraft, has been at all times and in all places, essentially the same. Differ about tenets as much as the several sects may, it is evident that, with all their hard words and holy hatred towards each other, they are at least alike concerned, if they do not, professedly act together, in carrying on their great system of deception. I have sometimes thought that they agree to differ, and to call hard names, in order to enlarge the ministerial trade, delude the people more successfully, and prevent their suspecting the

real motives which govern them in their operations. Thus priestcraft eludes detection; and its success is commensurate with the subtilty of its policy.

In intimating that the clergy of different denominations have a common understanding with each other, I have reference only to the *ringleaders*, the *principal managers*, the *great lions*. The *little whelps* know little or nothing of the matter. It is part of the policy of the *great lions* to set these by the ears; knowing that much advantage results to the cause of priestcraft from the unappeasable wrath and bitter contentions of their subordinate understrappers; and no doubt they often laugh in their sleeves to see them bite and tear and worry each other.

That the artful hypocrites who propel the wheels of priestcraft, whatever their sectarian appellation may be, pursue a similar policy, and, though differing in name, have a more friendly correspondence with each other than people are apt to imagine; that they all lend assistance in setting up the same Idol Bel and Dragon, differ as they may in the mummerly of forms; nay, that Popery itself is the grand bulwark of our protestant priestcraft, are facts susceptible of undeniable proof. Events have transpired during the last half century, which establish these positions beyond a doubt. What sympathy was manifested by our orthodox clergy for the corrupt Catholic priests who fell in the first French Revolution! Their *murder* was indeed a most guilty transaction; but why was so much said here about *the poor innocent martyrs*? why was not their fate deplored as *men*, rather than as *Christian brethren*? And when on the downfall of Bonaparte, the "*venerable institutions*" of Popery, of which the Inquisition was a principal one, were restored, and "*the Beast*," whose power had been curtailed by Bonaparte, was again enlarged, what celebrations, what public rejoicings, what solemn thanksgivings were had in the metropolis and other parts of this state, and elsewhere in New England, by express recommendation of our orthodox champion priests, (in which the Rev. Dr. Parish of Byfield acted a conspicuous part,) who participated in those festivals, and offered the tribute of thanksgiving to God, who had seen fit to permit an event which fulfilled their heart's desire! and they enjoined the same duty on all good christians.* Doubtless they most heartily rejoiced at the pleasing event—knowing that the example of Popery goes far to sustain their trade; that, paradoxical as it may seem, much of their strength is indirectly derived from the prosperous condition of Popery. They disavow, besure, all subordination to the Pope, nor would they be considered as auxiliary to the cause of *his* religion; yet, at the

*See Cobbett's "Letter to the Cossack Clergy of Massachusetts."

same time that they represent him as "the man of sin," his example is an excellent precedent for them to pattern after, or at least to follow at a humble distance—for they are very fond of being petty popes themselves. Indeed our orthodox clergy can no more get along without a pope than they can without a devil; and for aught I can discover, though they *acknowledge* no allegiance to either, they render faithful service equally to both.—Thus do the ringleaders of nearly all the religious sects, notwithstanding all their furious bigotry, their jealousy of rivalry, and their invidious feelings towards each other, natural to all men who stand in each other's way in scrambling for the spoil ("two of a trade cannot agree,") thus do they go hand in hand, in pursuing a common object; and the outlines of their policy are essentially the same.

CHAPTER VI.

CONTENTS.—True religion not fitted to the purpose of priestcraft. Superstition and terror, the necessary and usual machinery of priestcraft. Denunciations leveled against all who do not believe in orthodoxy. This course unauthorised by Christ's example. The writer would by no means say aught against true religion. The value and importance of true religion; its character described, and the blessings which are derived from it; also what true religion is not.

It would be as endless as profitless, to notice all the various superstitious doctrines which have prevailed in the world, by which mankind have been kept in ignorance and awe. True religion is founded on a principle of universal love and benevolence; and all its genuine doctrines grow out of this fundamental principle. But to adhere strictly to this principle, would by no means answer the purpose of priestcraft: were this generally done, its reign would terminate at once. The clergy, almost universally covetous of power and a splendid living, know that they can best bring people to subjection by preaching terror—by making an impression on their imagination and fears—by stuffing them with whims and silly scruples, and confusing their minds with metaphysical jargon—for men once taught to be bigots and fanatics, may be moulded at will, and made completely subservient to the views of avarice and ambition. From the great and fundamental principles of truth; from those sublime doctrines of universal love and benevolence which constitute true religion, they would fain divert people's minds; aware that they would have every thing to apprehend from the general prevalence of religion in its purity; it would

snatch the very bread and beef from their plates—the people would no longer consent to be priest-ridden—they would no longer be the passive drudges, the patient packhorses of the priests. To preach terror—to inculcate superstition—such is the Jesuit course ordinarily pursued by the orthodox clergy. It is to their interest to do so. But is this the way which the gospel prescribes, for the faithful minister, to make mankind, through the instrumentality of preaching, truly pious and virtuous?

“Believe in *the orthodox creed*, and be saved—or disbelieve, and suffer the punishment of eternal fire!” This preposterous sentiment is firmly clenched and riveted to weak and superstitious minds, by the hand of orthodox priestcraft. The fires of hell are ready lit for the great majority of mankind, who have not been brought into the ark of safety—the bosom of Orthodoxy! All such are totally depraved! &c. But did the Savior denounce promiscuous anathemas against the whole human family, except only a favored few? Did he represent them as totally depraved, or as deserving eternal wrath? Did he condemn all—harmless men, simple women, innocent children? No, it is only against the vile and iniquitous—particularly those who make a mockery of religion, and, “for a pretence, long prayers,” that his denunciations are leveled. But our good orthodox priests would have us believe that all mankind are worthy of eternal fire, those only excepted who embrace their creed; or if they are graciously pleased to make some further exceptions, they are in favor of only such individuals or sects as do not stand in their way—those whose tenets approximate, in rank absurdity, to their own. Those who believe in the orthodox creed, have the true saving faith, (no matter about good works) and may look down with holy horror, spiritual haughtiness, self-sufficiency, condescending pity, or contemptuous arrogance (according to their temperament) on the hell-deserving multitude!

Far be it from me to say anything against genuine religion. While all are required to guard against false religion; and to bear fearless testimony against it, in whatever imposing form it may appear, let none presume to say aught against true religion, which is kindly designed by Heaven to promote the happiness of man; to endue him with a proper sense of the various duties he owes to his Creator and fellow-men—unfold to his view the prospect of an hereafter, and direct him what preparation he is to make for the solemn hour of death, which will shortly translate his spirit to an endless state of existence. This religion is “not a vain thing, for it is our life.” It does not enjoin the practice of useless austerities, and so far from being a gloomy, unlovely associate, it is the only and gentle wisdom “whose ways are ways of pleasantness and all whose

paths are peace." (Its Author regards a sad countenance as an indication of hypocrisy.) It adds a sweet and holy zest to all our innocent enjoyments; and affords consolation and support in every trial and vicissitude of life; directing our hopes to a brighter and better world. It does not degrade and debase those who are governed by its influence, but refines, humanizes, ennobles them. It lays the foundation of a truly amiable and virtuous character. It effects a felicitous change of the heart from the love of evil to the love of good; restraining each unhallowed passion, all the propensities of undue self-love. Where the moral habits have become extremely vicious, in consequence of evil example, and long continuance in the ways of wickedness, time may be necessary to effect their entire reformation; but the power of religion ultimately subdues the moral malady of the soul. The renovated heart is animated with feelings of pure and ardent love and gratitude to God, and charity and good will towards man. Piety and devotional ardor mingle with the affections; the purest virtue becomes incorporated with the disposition; and the life and conversation of the happy subject is thenceforward a glorious illustration of the excellence, sublimity and beauty of the divine religion of Christ. It is then that serene peace, and

"That pure joy, without alloy,
Whose very rapture is tranquility,"

(not a boisterous extravagance) flow through the heart, like an uninterrupted stream. The soul soars above selfish and groveling objects, and meditates with delight on heavenly things—on the beauty of holiness—the perfections of the divine character—the wisdom, the goodness, the glory of God—the example, the love and compassion of the Redeemer.

Religion is to be prized as a treasure of inestimable value, not solely on account of the good it imparts, but for its inherent excellence and moral beauty. It is a pure and sublime principle. Whoever possesses it, will "love Heaven for its purity, and God for his goodness." He will love religion *aside* from the benefits it confers. Hence the conduct of such a man is consistent, and he is invariably honest, just, benevolent. His life is a constant exemplification of virtue. "Whatsoever he would that men should do to him, he does even so to them."

Religion does not consist in superstitious whims and slavish fears. It is not blind and self-willed bigotry. It is not a form of goodliness, adopted for "filthy lucre's sake." It is not the creature of a distempered imagination—a mere illusion—a certain something which floats on the surface of the mind. But it is a divine law, whose legitimate operations on

the heart, purifying its affections, restraining its wanderings, and effecting the most salutary and beneficent results. Yes, religion is that gentle wisdom from above which affords man his best hope, and purest and surest happiness. A hope which extends beyond the grave; for "life and immortality are brought to light" by the gospel. It will conduct us to the regions of celestial bliss and immortal glory. It is the most illustrious manifestation of the Divine goodness. It brightens the desert with sunshine, dispels every cloud, and animates the humble soul with the presence of the Divinity. The world, with all its alluring but deceptive charms, cannot secure to us equal happiness and glory. The hopes of earth will perish, its glories fade, its bubbles burst, and all its enjoyments cease. But the righteousness of Christ with which the redeemed will be clothed, is a celestial robe, which will remain unsullied and new, and adorn the soul forever. Such is religion; such its benign influence on the human character; such the felicity and glory it imparts in time and eternity. This is indeed but a faint and imperfect sketch; to portray its true character, with adequate justice, would require a pencil dipped in the loveliest hues of heaven.

Christianity has been, in every age since its first promulgation, more or less corrupted and perverted, and rendered subservient to unhallowed purposes. It has, alas! but too often been made the bitter source of wo." Its true interests have suffered, probably far more from its professed friends, than from its avowed enemies. It is not my design to give even a sketch of its various abuses, in past ages and other countries. I need not mention how it has been debased by an intermixture with every thing which is vile; how it has been loaded with monstrous errors and absurdities; what depravity, what selfishness, have been associated with it; what enormous crimes have been committed in its name; what profligacy, what venality, what oppression it has been made to sanction; how its adulterous connection with state has often transformed it into an engine of civil tyranny; what persecutions have been carried on by its boasted champions, under pretence of rendering it service; what myriads of martyrs have been doomed to the cruelist death, by wretches who professed to be its friends; what furious fanaticism, relentless bigotry, and pitiful delusion, have passed current in its name; what feuds, discords, animosities, have disgraced its history; what rivers of blood have been shed, to establish and enlarge its worldly empire. Time would fail, were I adequate to the task, and the reader would sicken at the recital. History is full of these melancholy details. The annals of Europe are polluted with them. Nor have we, Protestant Americans, been altogether spotless in these matters.

The eighteenth century, producing as it did a constellation

of men of genius and science unexampled in former ages, formed a grand era in human history. The anticipations indulged by those benefactors of mankind, whose philanthropic and laborious efforts in diffusing light, and liberal opinions, posterity will long admire and remember with gratitude, have been realized in a flattering degree. Deep-rooted prejudices have been eradicated, principles subversive of human rights, and creeds degrading to human nature, have been discarded, and ancient systems of error and absurdity exploded; and all, this to a very great extent. The mild empire of true religion, and of rational philosophy, has continued gradually to rise on the crumbling ruins of civil and ecclesiastical tyranny. The progress of civil and religious liberty has kept pace with the rapid march of intellect. Of course, religious abuses do not flourish, at the present day, with the same rank luxuriance, as in former times. In the old world, political tyranny indeed still struggles to maintain its usurpations, and ecclesiastical tyranny studies hard to retain its power and privileges. To this end, the former has intrenched itself in a Holy Alliance, while the latter resorts, as usual, to its accustomed craft. Thus, lawless kings and hypocrite priests cling to their unrighteous but sinking cause. Their ship however, must one day go down, and they with it. Europe will then be emancipated from the thralldom of superstition, and its concomitants, and delivered from church despotism.

From time immemorial, priestcraft has gone hand in hand with that craft which sustains the usurpation of despotic authority. Priestcraft has consecrated the "divine rights" of kings; kings in return for the favor, have protected and patronised priestcraft. Thus, "*Moses and Aaron*" (if I may be allowed this figurative mode of expression) have jointly reigned. Of the latter it may be observed, that he has played his part with such skill, as either to be able to exercise the chief control by consent, or otherwise to secure an influence amounting in effect, to a very goodly share of supreme power.

In our own highly-favored land, where the principles of civil and religious liberty are well understood, and guarded by the virtue and intelligence of a republican community, and by that jealousy inherent in the breasts of freemen, the clergy dare not attempt those bold measures, and set up those arrogant pretensions, which they are wont to do under the protection of a monarchical government and corrupt and profligate court, and where the great mass of the people are an ignorant, wretched and degraded populace. They know that the people here would not submit to it. In order therefore to gain their ends, they are obliged to put a vast deal of curiously organized *machinery* in operation. They secretly and skilfully touch the wires which put their complicated machinery in motion, and

results are produced very much (though not altogether) to their mind.

But hitherto, thank Heaven, all the machinations of priestcraft have failed to accomplish the main object in view. Our priests have been unable to obtain that which they have so eagerly, so constantly, and with many prayers sought after—to wit, *a sectarian establishment by law*, guarantying extraordinary privileges and immunities to the priestly order. They have coveted that preeminence in vain. All their insidious attempts to bring it about have proved abortive. I pray God they never may succeed; for, as soon as time and circumstances would admit, they would erect the standard of Intolerance—an evil which may God in mercy for ever avert. Alas! how has it chafed and mortified poor Aaron that his favorite project has not been prospered according to his wishes! With what longings has he turned his desiring eyes to the fat livings of the English hierarchy! What charms he discovers in the British Constitution, which establishes the union of Church and State, and makes such pious and bountiful provision for the clerical household! And what an impious instrument, in his estimation, is our own Constitution, which guaranties equal religious liberty to all denominations; and which does not enforce the worship of God by penal authority! No, nor even recognizes the superior rights of the priesthood! How he laments the *irreligion* of our government! Alas, poor Aaron! you may as well dry your tears, and set your heart at rest; for Americans will never submit to be ridden and ruled by an arrogant and domineering hierarchy.

It is evident, however, that the clergy entertain strong hopes that they will eventually succeed, in erecting a hierarchal establishment. At any rate, Aaron is resolved to adopt every stratagem, and strain every nerve, to gain all possible influence and power. Despairing of present success in introducing spiritual worships on the English model, his efforts are directed to the building up *a spiritual aristocracy*, which will invest the clergy with at least very exalted privileges, and secure to them an extensive and growing influence. This will pave the way, it is hoped, to the ultimate accomplishment of the main object.

The free citizens of the United States, with the light of history before their eyes, and availing themselves of the wisdom and experience to be derived from it, are too well aware of the injustice and impolicy of exclusive religious establishments by law, to permit their introduction. They are not insensible of the evils which, in past ages, have flowed, and, in all instances, inevitably must flow from such establishments. Nor will they ever, I trust, have the weakness to extend legal favoritism to any predominant sect. Efforts by the clergy, and

their weak or interested auxiliaries, have been repeatedly made in the New England and some of the other older states, and with great perseverance and address, to invest the priestly order with extraordinary privileges and immunities. Hitherto, all have failed; and not only so, but in many instances, these efforts have had the effect to lower the influence and curtail the power of the clergy. The virtue, the good sense, the justice, the jealousy of the people, have defeated all their projects; or, at any rate, few and comparatively trifling have been the exceptions which have disgraced our legislation, in giving licence to priestly oppression, and strengthening sectarian power. The infamous history of religious oppression and persecution, teaches a tremendous lesson to mankind; and the blood of martyrs shed in past ages, pleads with an efficacy not to be resisted in favor of equal religious liberty, and the peaceful and perfect enjoyment of the rights of conscience. The intellectual advance—the universal dissemination of knowledge in our land of liberty, has enabled reason to assert its full prerogative, and rational religion to make its dictates heard. Both emphatically proclaim that the rights of conscience are not to be violated.

The gross folly and injustice of religious establishments by law, were never urged with greater clearness and force, than in the celebrated Memorial and Remonstrance against the General Assessment bill, presented to the General Assembly of Virginia in 1785. The lucid and unanswerable arguments advanced by the illustrious author of that production,* “are such as cannot be refuted, without denying the first and most essential principles of rational liberty.” The following extracts from it will be read with pleasure.

“We hold it for a fundamental and unalienable truth,” (says the Memorial) “That religion, or the duty which we owe to the Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence.’ The religion, then, of every man, must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it, as these may dictate. This right is, in its nature, an unalienable right. It is unalienable; because the opinions of men depending only on the evidence contemplated by their own minds, cannot follow the dictates of other men. It is unalienable also, because what is here a right towards man, is a duty towards the Creator. It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage, and such only, as he believes to be acceptable to him. This duty is precedent, both in order of time, and in degree of obligation, to the claims of civil society. Before any man can be consid-

*James Madison, since president of the U. S.

ered as a subject of the Governor of the universe. And if a member of civil society, who enters into any subordinate association, must always do it with a reservation of his duty to the general authority; much more must every man who becomes a member of any particular civil society, do it with a saving of his allegiance to the universal Sovereign. We maintain, therefore, that, in matters of religion, no man's right is abridged by the institution of civil society; and that religion is wholly exempt from its cognizance. * * *

“ If religion be exempt from the authority of the society at large, still less can it be subject to that of the legislative body. The latter are but the creatures and vicegerents of the former. Their jurisdiction is both derivative and limited. It is limited with regard to the co-ordinate departments: more necessarily, it is limited with regard to the constituents. The preservation of a free government requires, not merely that the metes and bounds which separate each department of power, be invariably maintained; but more especially, that neither of them be suffered to overleap the great barrier which defends the rights of the people. The rulers who are guilty of such an encroachment, exceed the commission from which they derive their authority, and are tyrants. The people who submit to it, are governed by laws made neither by themselves, nor by any authority derived from them, and are slaves. * * *

“ Who does not see that the same authority which can establish christianity in exclusion of all other religions, may establish, with the same ease, any particular sect of christians, in exclusion of all other sects: That the same authority which can force a citizen to contribute three pence only of his property, for the support of any one establishment, may force him to conform to any other establishment, in all cases whatsoever.

“ ‘ If all men are, by nature, equally free and independent, ’ all men are to be considered as entering into society on equal conditions, as relinquishing no more, and therefore requiring no less, one than another, of their natural rights: above all, are they to be considered as retaining an ‘ equal title to the free exercise of religion according to the dictates of conscience. ’ Whilst we assert for ourselves a freedom to embrace, to profess, and observe the religion which we believe to be of divine origin; we cannot deny an equal freedom to those whose minds have not yet yielded to the evidence which has convinced us. If this freedom be abused, it is an offence against God, not against man. To God, therefore, and not to man, must an account of it be rendered.

“ As the bill violates equality, by subjecting some to peculiar burdens; so it violates the same principle, by granting to others peculiar exemptions. Are the Quakers and Mennonists the only sects who think a compulsive support of their religions

unnecessary and unwarrantable? Can their piety alone be entrusted with the care of public worship? Ought their religions to be endowed, above all others, with extraordinary privileges, by which proselytes may be enticed from all others? We think too favorably of the justice and good sense of these denominations, to believe that they either covet preeminences above their fellow-citizens, or that they will be seduced by them from the common opposition to the measure.

“The bill implies, either that the civil magistrate is a competent judge of religious truths, or that he may employ religion as an engine of civil policy. The first is an arrogant pretensions, falsified by the extraordinary opinion of rulers, in all ages, and throughout the world; the second, an unhallowed perversion of the means of salvation.

“The establishment proposed by the bill is not requisite for the support of the Christian religion. To say that it is, is a contradiction to the Christian religion itself; for every page of it disavows a dependence on the power of this world; it is a contradiction to fact; for it is known that this religion both existed and flourished, not only without the support of human laws, but in spite of every opposition from them; and not only during the period of miraculous aid, but long after it had been left to its own evidence and the ordinary care of Providence; nay, it is a contradiction in terms; for a religion not invented by human policy, must have pre-existed and been supported before it was established by human policy; it is moreover to weaken in those who profess this religion a pious confidence in its innate excellence and the patronage of its Author; and to foster in those who still reject it, a suspicion that its friends are too conscious of its fallacies, to trust it to its own merits.

“Experience witnesses that ecclesiastical establishments, instead of maintaining the purity and efficacy of religion, have had a contrary operation. During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the clergy; ignorance and servility in the laity; in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution. Inquire of the teachers of Christianity for the ages in which it appeared in its greatest lustre? those of every sect point to the ages prior to its incorporation with civil policy. Propose a restoration of this primitive state, in which its teachers depended on the voluntary rewards of their flocks, many of them predict its downfall. On which side ought their testimony to have greatest weight, when for, or when against their interest?

“The establishment in question, is not necessary for the support of civil government. If it be urged as necessary for the support of civil government, only as it is a means of supporting religion, and it be not necessary for the latter purpose,

it cannot be necessary for the former. If religion be not within the cognizance of civil government, how can its legal establishment be said to be necessary to civil government? What influence in fact have ecclesiastical establishments had on civil society? In some instances they have been seen to erect a spiritual tyranny on the ruins of the civil authority; in more instances have they been seen upholding the thrones of political tyranny; in no instance have they been seen the guardians of the liberties of the people. Rulers who wished to subvert the public liberty, may have found an established clergy convenient auxiliaries. A just government, instituted to secure and perpetuate it, needs them not. Such a government will be best supported by protecting every citizen in the enjoyment of his religion, with the same equal hand which protects his person and his property; by neither invading the equal rights of any sect, nor suffer any sect to invade those of another. **

“ Torrents of blood have been spilt in the old world, by vain attempts of the secular arm to extinguish religious discord by proscribing all differences in religious opinion. Time has at length revealed the true remedy. Every relaxation of narrow and rigorous policy, wherever it has been tried, has been found to assuage the disease. * * * If we begin to contract the bounds of religious freedom, we know of no name that will too severely reproach our folly.”

Such are some of the arguments contained in that invaluable exposition of truth. It will be read and remembered as long as letters endure. It speaks the sentiments of the great mass of the American people. They walk by the same light which it sheds. - May the sentiments it breathes pervade every heart for ever! They are just, they are noble, they are patriotic. But the truths embodied in that celebrated Memorial, are far from being relished by the generality of the clergy. To coax and cozen the people however, they will sometimes talk in fine-spun terms in favor of free, liberal toleration—although, apprehending the danger which would accrue to their craft from the universal prevalence of its spirit, they occasionally affect to regard it as one of the appendages of infidelity, and represent the liberality which would allow perfect freedom in religious matters to every individual, as the offspring of licentious principle.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONTENTS.—Intolerance prohibited by the Constitution, and abhorred by the people. But neither Constitution nor public opinion affords perfect security against the insidious encroachments of priestcraft. An Established Church the idol and darling object of the clergy. Allusions to their artful manœuvres and subtil measures. Church tyranny the worst of all tyranny; but happily, Americans are not liable to be scourged by it.

Intolerance can never flourish in our enlightened America; of this we may rest assured. Not only do our Constitution and laws prohibit it, but what is still more, it is barred out, and I trust ever will be effectually, by the utter abhorrence and vigilant jealousy of the great majority of the people. The magnanimous sages who framed our Constitution, were too well aware what bitter fruits it had produced in the “mother country,” and elsewhere, to suffer it to take root here. The grand charter of liberty which they established, secures equal rights and privileges to every citizen, and “forbids, by eternal interdiction, a crown to ambition and a mitre to fanaticism. Conscience is left unconfined as the benevolence of Deity.”

It is a melancholy truth, however, that neither Constitution, nor law, nor the vigilance, virtue, and intelligence of the people, can afford a perfect security against the insidious encroachments and jesuit influence of an aspiring priesthood. And what combination is so formidable as a combination of priests? With what cunning, what adroitness, what consummate skill they direct their movements! Availing themselves of every convenient auxiliary—of a thousand fortuitous circumstances—of the superstition which they themselves foster—of the weakness, the credulity, the very calamities of mankind, they ingratiate themselves into favor, they lay claim to the highest reverence, and are thus enabled to mould and manage multitudes almost at pleasure. But who can adequately describe their manœuvres, and the masterly manner in which they perform their evolutions?

Would but the people pay the priests “tithes of all,” as Abraham did Melchisedec, their hearts would be fully comforted, and they would load with ample blessings those whom they fleece and gull. An ESTABLISHED CHURCH—with all its fat livings, power, patronage, and goodly portion of influence—its gorgeous appendages, its imposing grandeur—all the sacred pomp and paraphernalia of an ESTABLISHED CHURCH! Oh! it is enough to make the priestly mouth water! The hopes, the affections of, perhaps, most of the clergy, can never be separated from an ESTABLISHED CHURCH. The language of their heart’s prayer is, “When we forget thee, O darling object, may our right hand forget its cunning.” Proceed slow

but sure, is the motto of priestcraft. It would gain by degrees, what it cannot compass at once; and supply by art, what it cannot accomplish by industry. Its perseverance is unremitting. Its longing eyes are constantly fixed on the recompense of reward—the gratification of its own selfishness. It concentrates all its force, unites all its efforts, puts in requisition all its energies. And it labors not in vain—for why should it, when so many are engaged in the cause? Will it be able to fetch an ESTABLISHED CHURCH in the end? No—NEVER!

But on the subject of Intolerance.—Church tyranny is the worst of all tyranny, and most to be deprecated. It has more or less disgraced the annals of every nation in Christendom. But the free American citizen may assure himself of finding protection against the violence of persecution and the vengeance of bigotry, in the equitable laws of an enlightened and sovereign people. He may assure himself, that all the maledictions, anathemas and denunciations of those who would fain hold *the keys of St. Peter*, will play harmless around him in time, and never reach his soul in eternity.

CHAPTER IX.

CONTENTS.—Priestcraft upheld by Aristocracy. A religion of pride and popularity, patronized by the opulent. The writer would not level indiscriminate censures against the clergy. An honest, faithful minister is worthy of great respect. Characteristics of a good minister.

It must be obvious to every judicious observer, that of all the noxious plants which, at the present day, are struggling for growth, and most endanger the existence of our civil liberty, *Aristocracy and Priestcraft* are the deadliest and most pernicious. I leave it to politicians to discuss the question of Aristocracy: but I would say in this connection, that never, probably, in any country, did aristocracy stride onward with such rapidity as it has done within a few years past in our youthful republic. This fact inspires the champions of priestcraft with fresh hope, that their efforts will eventually be crowned with complete success; knowing that their craft must needs flourish under the banner of aristocracy. Accordingly, religion has, in most populous places, during the last twenty years especially, been tricked out in gorgeous trappings, and transformed into a thing of fashion and popularity, suited to the exalted views and high-toned feelings of those who roll in lux-

ury and take delight in splendor and aggrandizement. And now, what throngs of spiritual grandees come in their coaches every Sabbath to worship the meek and lowly Jesus! Survey the glittering magnificence of the scene! Well may priestcraft fatten and flourish, when pride and pomp sustain it! Well may its hopes soar high, as it thus thrives under the auspices of aristocracy!

But let neither the clergy nor the aristocracy carry their hopes too high. Each of these classes has obstacles in the way of its ambition altogether insurmountable. The coalition of the priests and the aristocrats is truly formidable; but the virtue, intelligence, and jealousy of the great majority of the people, will always effectually and seasonably check the usurpations of both these classes.

Perhaps it may be thought by some, for whose opinion I ought to have the highest regard, that my remarks respecting the clergy are too severe. I would not be understood, as regarding every minister of religion guilty of the charges I have preferred against the order generally; it is the crafty and the corrupt only, whom I would accuse. I take great pleasure in the belief, that there are many good and worthy men among the clergy; men entitled to the highest confidence and respect. A sincere, faithful, peace-making minister, one who is free from superstition, bigotry, dogmatism, intolerance, priestcraft, arrogance, covetousness, *levdness*; one who inculcates by example, as well as by precept, the genuine principles of pure and undefiled religion, is an ornament and a blessing to society, and ought to be duly respected and decently supported. Such a minister well knows that he has no right to denounce those who may differ from him in religious opinion, as infidels, and to represent them as candidates for eternal perdition. Far be it from me to indulge a rancorous and indiscriminate antipathy towards the clergy. In the language of Cowper,

"I revere the man whose heart is warm,
Whose hands are pure, whose actions and whose life,
Coincident, exhibit lucid proof
That he is *honest* in the sacred cause;
To such I render more than mere respect,
Whose actions show that they respect themselves."

The duties devolving on a professed teacher of christianity are various, arduous, and important, and involve a tremendous responsibility. To illustrate the true principles of religion in all their purity and variety, and with impressive solemnity; to inculcate those principles by the exhibition of an example correspondent with the obligations they impose; to discriminate the doctrines of truth from the thousand errors with which on every hand they are encompassed; to combat infidelity, and vindicate religion from the attacks of its enemies; to impart

timely counsel suited to the various wants and circumstances of his people; these with other important duties to which his profession will constantly call him, require, in their faithful discharge, his most assiduous attention, and the exercise of all his mental and moral faculties. Nor will such a minister, when he ascends the desk, weary his audience with a monotonous repetition of stale absurdities, calculated to make the subject of religion insipid or irksome to his hearers; but he will bring forth from the great treasury of truth, things profitable for them to understand.

But no servile homage, no passive obedience is due, even to an honest minister. Yet some delight to bow to priestly arrogance, and slavishly surrender their own judgment (if they have any judgment) in deference to their minister.

I am sorry to impute sinister motives to any who profess to be servants of Christ; who ought to walk uprightly, and to be free from guile; but observation has convinced me, that very many of the clergy are not only not perfect, but arrant knaves and hypocrites; are not only subject to like passions as other men, but are full of duplicity and all iniquity. From such apostles may the church be delivered. From wolves in sheep's clothing may God preserve his people. Such seek only their own interest; but the truly pious and humble servant of God, as a faithful shepherd, cares for the well-being of his flock.

CHAPTER X.

CONTENTS.—A brief review of some of the fundamental doctrines of Orthodoxy. Of total depravity. Of personal election and reprobation. Of endless punishment. The deplorable circumstances under which a great majority of mankind are placed, if these doctrines be true.

Omitting, for the present, any further remarks respecting priestcraft, superstition, hypocrisy, &c., I will now take a hasty glance at some of the fundamental doctrines of self-styled Orthodoxy. The orthodoxy of the day, we all know, is a modification of ancient Calvinism, adapted to the times. Professedly it is established on the Calvinistic platform, although on some important points, it has prudently diverged not a little from the original Calvinistic faith.

I shall here limit my observations to the three leading doctrines of *Total Depravity*, *Personal Election and Reprobation*, and *Endless Punishment*. The utter absurdity of each of these doctrines must be apparent, on the slightest examination, to every sound, unbiassed mind.

First, of *Total Depravity*.—Orthodoxy maintains that all mankind are, by nature, totally depraved. In support of this doctrine, the orthodox are accustomed to bring forward a passage in Isaiah, and affect to regard it as perfectly conclusive. The passage reads as follows:—"The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores." Is. 1, 5 & 6. This passage, we are told, proves incontestibly that all mankind are totally depraved; that all their moral faculties and feelings, from their earliest developement, are thoroughly polluted with sin! What wretched sophistry this! The prophet was describing, in *strongly figurative language*, the great wickedness of a people who had been signally favored of the Lord, but who notwithstanding had "rebelled" against him, had become a people "laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers," and "corrupters," and had "forsaken" him. The description was applied to a particular nation, guilty of uncommon wickedness. It was not applied to heathen nations, less sinful, because privileged with less light; it was not applied to the blameless and unoffending of mankind; it was not applied to human nature in general. Nor does this figurative description necessarily prove the *total* depravity, even of those to whom it *was* applied.

Both revelation and reason clearly disprove this absurd doctrine. According to the bible, God loves the world, but hates sin. But if the world is totally depraved, how can he love it? Does he love pure, unmixed sin, or total depravity? No, he hates sin, though he loves the world, that is, man, notwithstanding his transgressions; which proves there must be something in his nature besides sin, otherwise God could not love man.

Let us for a moment take a survey of human nature. Does the smile of the playful infant furnish an evidence of its original total depravity? Are the warm susceptibilities of human feeling—the native sensibilities of the heart—the fires of generous affection—the spontaneous effusions of sympathy—the impulse of gratitude—all the kindly emotions and best charities of our nature, but so many proofs of our total depravity? Is conscience itself nothing more nor less than total depravity? Imperfect as man is by nature, and bad as he is capable of becoming, I yet do not believe that any individual of a race whom God originally made in his own image and likeness, and whom he so loved that he sent his Son into the world to suffer and to die to purchase their redemption, was ever yet born with a nature totally depraved. Human nature, though fallen from its first high estate, and marred by sin, still retains some faint traces of the divine image: sublime even in its ruins, like the Parthenon, whose beautiful but prostrate columns present

to the view of the spectator the melancholy evidence of what the glorious structure once was.

Query. How happens it that certain clergymen, who are in the habit of representing all the ungodly who have not "experienced religion," as totally depraved, are so willing to receive from such totally depraved sinners, a large slice of their ministerial support?

I now pass on to the consideration of the doctrine of *Personal Election and Reprobation*.

That the reader may see what the Calvinistic doctrine of Election and Reprobation is, I will here transcribe some of the articles in the Saybrook Platform, as agreed upon by an association of ministers more than a century ago, which remain to this day a part of the established creed of orthodoxy. The Cambridge Confession, and other later digests of the Calvinistic or orthodox faith, do not vary essentially in substance from the Saybrook Platform. More latterly however, much pains is taken to soften and disguise the rigid features of Calvinism.

"By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained unto everlasting death.

"Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, *without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace.*

"The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, *for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, and to the praise of his glorious justice.*"

In regard to the non-elect, another article says,

"Others not of the elect, although they may be called by the ministers of the word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet not being effectually drawn by the Father, they neither do *nor can come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved; much less can men not professing the Christian religion be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature,* and the law of that religion they profess; and to as-*

*The millions of heathen, who never heard of the name of Christ, will of course all be for ever damned! Even the soul of the virtuous Socrates is subjected to the vengeance of eternal fire!

sert and maintain that they may, is very pernicious and to be detested!!”

The orthodox of the present day are rather ashamed of these most absurd, and even blasphemous doctrines; and their ministers seldom dare preach them. If at any time they venture to preach them, they take care to disguise and gloss them over. To make this rank Calvinism go down with the people, “they resort to their usual sophistry, in confounding terms and words, to perplex the mind.” We see abundance of their duplicity in this matter.

In truth, the “horrible decrees” of John Calvin have latterly grown quite unfashionable, even with a majority perhaps, of the orthodox. A doctrine which represents the divine government in the light of a capricious despotism, having no regard, in the distribution of rewards and punishments, to the merit or demerit of the subject, is too unspeakably absurd, too fraught with blasphemy, to be relished in this enlightened age. It represents the Supreme Being as having been moved, by what in man we should denominate mere whim, to make an irreversible decree that a certain portion of his creatures should be infallibly damned to endless ages, notwithstanding all they can possibly do to gain his approbation! And if he pretends to offer them terms of mercy, what is it but a mockery, since it is not his good pleasure to grant them the power of complying with the terms required. Were one to place choice provisions at a distance from a man shut up in a strong iron cage, and bound hand and foot, and then invite him to eat and drink, would it not be a grievous mockery? But if the creature had power to comply with God’s requirements, it would avail him nothing, for neither “faith nor good works,” nor “any other thing in the creature,” can move or cause God to extend mercy to the creature. In fact, the pretended terms are no terms, and God is represented in the light of an imposter and deceiver, as well as a partial sovereign and capricious tyrant!!

Hopkins went so far as to say, that “God moves, executes, and stirs up men to do that which is sinful; he deceives, blinds, hardens, and puts sin into the heart, by a positive creative influence!!” This he first does, and then consigns them to endless wo! But if God thus “deceives, blinds, hardens, and puts sin into the heart” of the creature, how does the creature sin voluntarily? What free agency has he? And how is he justly accountable for the sins he commits? God, we are told, gives to the creature a nature totally depraved; more than this, if he has designed him for perdition, he “deceives, blinds, hardens, and puts sin into his heart;” nay, ere he was born, he unalterably decreed his eternal damnation. What can he do? And yet we are told that God is justified in thus punishing him. How, on what principle, he is justified, our learned

metaphysical priests perfectly understand, no doubt ; to them it is no mystery ; but if it be too tedious to detail all the particulars how, to cut the matter short, they tell us, in a round about way, that God has a sovereign right to deal subtly with his weak and fallible creatures, and to “deceive” and overreach them, in order to bring them into a horrible snare!

And now as to *Endless Punishment*.—Eternal misery is a doctrine so inconceivably irrational, that I cannot bring my mind to believe that any man who duly and soberly reflects upon the subject, either does or can sincerely believe in the doctrine.

God hath declared it to be his will, that all should be brought to a knowledge of the truth, and be saved. And who hath counteracted his will? What can frustrate his designs?

There is not a good man on earth who does not desire the salvation of all. And will God, who is the fountain of all goodness, and who hath power to execute the counsels of his own will, consign any poor soul to endless torment? Is he less merciful than man? But it is said, that *the glory of God* requires the eternal damnation, not of a few only, but of the far greater part of mankind! that *divine justice* requires it! and that this is required *to make his power known to the universe!!* nay, that he would cease to be a *Sovereign God*, unless he fulfilled the demands of justice by inflicting endless punishment on a large portion of his frail beings of yesterday, whom, while it is his good will and pleasure to spare others, he predestinated to irremediable and eternal wo!!! as though his sovereign power could not be as gloriously illustrated in the salvation, as in the damnation, of his creatures! I would ask, Can it add to his happiness—can it redound to his glory—can it illustrate his goodness, his mercy, or his justice, to chain beings whom he hath created down to eternal misery? Would it be consistent with the attributes of his divine character? If not, is it possible he should do this?

The doctrine of eternal punishment implies a collision of the attributes of Deity; justice is at variance with mercy, and sovereignty violates goodness and benevolence. Now unless we deny that the Divinity is a perfect being, we must believe that his several attributes necessarily harmonize, one with another.

Some deem it necessary that endless punishment be preached, even on the supposition that the doctrine be untrue—in order to restrain people from vicious practices, and prevent licentiousness. Is falsehood, then, better calculated than truth, to effect a good result? Or is it lawful to represent the Divine Being as an unmerciful tyrant, for any purpose whatever? It were horrible blasphemy to say it. But let us examine this pretension. The greatest sinners, we are told, if elected to salvation, are perfectly secure from the consequences of sin;

while the condition of the most virtuous men, if they are predestinated to eternal burning, is utterly hopeless. Is such doctrine best calculated to promote moral virtue? By representing endless damnation as sure, provided salvation has not been decreed, all encouragement to a virtuous life is taken away. If it has been unalterably foreordained by the Omnipotent God, that one is to suffer endless punishment, of what use is it for him to practice virtue? On the other hand, if one is elected to salvation, he is sure of salvation, and what profit will good works be to him? They will not strengthen one jot his security of future bliss. Sin will be to him a cheap commodity; it will indeed cost him nothing. No detriment will accrue to him from the commission of the greatest crime. Such will be the reasonings of mankind on the subject, and they will act accordingly. Thus the doctrine of endless punishment, in connexion with that of election and reprobation, is by no means calculated to have a moral tendency.

The torments of the damned, whether produced by literal fire and brimstone, as was formerly the orthodox opinion, or by remorse of conscience, are described as inconceivably dreadful. Now if those torments are to last to all eternity, how can it be said that the punishment is proportioned to the degree of guilt demanding it, when that guilt was incurred in a momentary space of time? But we are told that punishment will be endless, because the damned will never cease to sin and blaspheme, and therefore never cease to deserve punishment. In answer to this I would say, that I never read in the bible of any other accountability than for deeds *done in the body*—for sin committed in this life. Nothing is said about being punished for sin committed hereafter.

If the doctrine of endless punishment be true, then is God, instead of a merciful being, infinitely more cruel and unmerciful than the most hardened wretch the world ever produced. And here let us imagine a case. Suppose that some inhuman ruffian has done an individual all possible injury which can be conceived. Suppose the individual injured to be a monster of cruelty, and possessed of the most revengeful and hardened feelings. Suppose that he has got the one who has injured him completely within his power, and he is at full liberty to wreak his vengeance upon him at pleasure. How sweet to his soul is the opportunity he has of revenge! Let us suppose too, for the purpose of making out a strong case, that the lives of both parties shall be prolonged by miracle for thousands of years—that the victim shall be capable of suffering the most excruciating tortures which human ingenuity can invent, for any length of time, without the possibility of dying. For hours, for days, for months, for long, long years, nay, for ages for aught I know, the vengeance of the hard-hearted, iron-

nerved individual who had suffered such mighty wrong at the hands of his victim, shall remain unsatisfied—he still witnesses his agonies with transports of delight. But would there *never* arrive a time when even his adamant heart would relent? when, witnessing his indescribable, long-protracted agonies, his writhing, his wrestling with pain, and hearing his screeches, his groans, his doleful wails, he would cry out, It is enough—let the miserable wretch be spared? No, it is not in human nature to witness such long-continued, intense sufferings, without softening with compassion. And has the Father of all Mercy less compassion than the most obdurate, “totally depraved” monster of cruelty on earth? that ages of suffering cannot satisfy the demands of his inexorable wrath, but ten thousand thousand times ten thousand millions of years, nay, a never, never-ending eternity of suffering can alone suffice? and this infinite vengeance inflicted on a wretched worm of the dust, whose season of sin was but for a moment, and who, though he might violate the laws of his Maker, could do him no possible injury?

The scriptures do not assert that God loved a *part* of the world only, and provided a ransom for the redemption of that part, but that he loved *the world*, that is, the *whole* world. Now whom God loveth he chasteneth. He correcteth, as a father correcteth his children. The design of all punishment which he inflicts, is to effect the reformation and promote the good of his creatures. Therefore it is not possible he should punish to infinite ages.

The doctrine of endless punishment is entirely irreconcilable with that sentiment of justice, which God has incorporated with our nature. And to say it is *necessary* that God should punish eternally, in order to maintain and display his sovereignty, is horrible blasphemy. What! are we to represent God as reduced to the dilemma of being an unmerciful tyrant, or of ceasing to be a Sovereign Deity? To form such ideas of our Creator, is to insult the Majesty of Heaven.

Thus much for some of the prominent doctrines of “orthodoxy.” In concluding this long chapter, (which has taken up too much room, though I have been as brief as possible) I will bring into one view the deplorable circumstances, according to orthodoxy, under which a vast majority of the human race are introduced into being. Totally depraved, and incapable of doing aught to gain the approbation of Heaven—having the world, the flesh, and the devil to tempt them to sin, the devil having proved himself an overmatch for man while he was in a state of moral rectitude, strong in his own unimpaired virtue, and protected by his Maker, whose peculiar favorite he was—and moreover predestinated from eternity, by an absolute, sovereign decree of God, to endless perdition;—such are the cir-

cumstances under which, according to orthodoxy, a very great majority of the human race have been placed, by a merciful God, during a period of more than five thousand years! If all this be true, if such be their condition and destiny, better, infinitely better, for all this countless host, had they never been born.

CHAPTER XI.

CONTENTS.—Some pay greater deference to Calvinism than Christianity. The absurdity of paying such homage to the character and creed of such a man as John Calvin. What horrible doctrines were preached some years ago. Why the orthodox clergy were obliged to soften their doctrines. The Orthodox obliged to copy after the Methodists, and other rival sects. Though humiliating, better do so than worse. Calvinism not preached during revivals. Difficult to tell what the orthodox system of faith is at the present day. Of the orthodox Devil. Orthodoxy, though often new-modeled, as absurd as ever. Few intelligent and honest men embrace Orthodoxy.

Never was a more gloomy and cruel creed than Calvinism. And yet some seem to pay greater deference to the dogmas of Calvin, than to the pure doctrines of Christ. Such are all for Calvinism—they seem to think it transcends Christianity, and sinks it in the shade. How absurd, how unaccountable, how passing strange it is, that multitudes, in an age so enlightened as the present, should still continue implicitly to receive the preposterous creed of a gloomy fanatic, of an age little better than barbarous, as infallible! should still pay such deference to his doctrines, as precludes both freedom of thought and rational inquiry! should still regard the memory of the awful Calvin, the murderer of Servetus, with a veneration approaching to idolatry, and wellnigh worship him as a god! In the work of reformation from popery, Calvin doubtless did much good in his day; but his writings have been instrumental of immeasurable evil.

I recollect well what horrible doctrines were formerly preached, ere the orthodox clergy found it expedient to soften down or disguise some of the rigid features of Calvinism. The torments of the damned were represented as giving a zest to the holy joys of the saints in glory, who would behold their indescribable sufferings with ineffable satisfaction, as the glorious illustration of God's vindictive justice! Even the damnation of infants not a span long, whose skulls would form the pavement of hell, would be witnessed with transports of delight—that too would contribute to augment the felicity of the redeemed!

Nay, elect mothers would behold their non-elect offspring, whom they so tenderly loved on earth, writhing in dreadful agonies, and hear their screeches and wails, with unutterable ecstasy!! Horrible and revolting as such doctrines are, they were occasionally preached as genuine Calvinism, or rather Edwardianism and Hopkinsianism, superadded to the original Calvinistic structure. But such monstrous doctrines could not always go. Infant damnation was too shocking to the feelings of maternal tenderness to be endured, and was obliged to be abandoned, or passed over in silence. Other repulsive doctrines had also to be plastered over, and the sect, that had arrogantly assumed the name of "the *standing* order," found itself in a fair way of becoming the *falling* order, unless it timely modified or receded from the rigors of primitive Calvinism. Other sects had arisen, who, laying aside altogether, or nearly so, the system of terror, and adopting a new method, that of appealing to the tender passions and sympathetic feelings of people, and resorting to flattery and persuasion, were making proselytes with a rapidity which alarmed "the standing order." The Calvinists had witnessed the amazing success of the Methodists, especially, and saw at last the true secret of proselytism. It was doubtless humiliating to copy after the ignorant, itinerant, and despised preachers of that sect; but the thing had to be done, else the orthodox order would speedily go down. "Protracted meetings," in imitation of their audacious rivals, must be got up; and Arminian doctrines, and Methodist practices adopted, at least during "revivals." This I say must have been extremely humiliating to the supercilious spirit of the learned and reverend doctors of Calvinistic divinity. It must have been humiliating to a body of men that had been so long accustomed to dictate in religious matters, to enjoy extraordinary legal immunities, and to bear pre-eminence over all other sects, thus to be obliged to "stoop," not "to conquer," but to save a remnant of their departing power. I have sometimes smiled to see them associating with their rivals during religious "awakenings"—to see them striving to conceal their jealousy and chagrin! But better so than worse; better condescend to salute and honor and even fellowship their rivals, than to dwindle away to insignificance as a sect, and be left in the lurch both as to influence and support. They therefore, during revivals, profess to be desirous of union and fellowship with their Methodist and Baptist *brethren*. "It seems this union is desired, not so much for the promotion of truth and righteousness, as to retrieve a lost influence, and obtain honor of the people."* They deem it very impolitic to preach rank Calvinism during revivals! Doubtless it would be so.

* History of Defection in N. England, p. 30.

But surely it can neither be impolitic nor unprofitable, to preach the genuine doctrines of the word of God, at all times and on all occasions. And what are we to think of those doctrines which it is necessary to disguise or keep out of sight? Would not the truth as it is in Christ, answer much better at all times, than the antiquated dogmas of Calvin?

It is truly difficult to tell exactly what the present standard of orthodoxy is, in regard to doctrines. Its learned expositors have labored hard to reconcile the glaring inconsistencies and conceal the ludicrous absurdities of its doctrinal system, and to render it palatable to the public taste, grown rather fastidious of late years; but they have but poorly succeeded in the business. They have patched and pieced, and attempted to close up a rent here, and a rent there; but still the poor old garment is a miserable covering to hide the nakedness of those who wear it.

They describe hell as a very comfortable place, compared with what it formerly was; in truth, the idea of a hell of literal fire and brimstone, they have almost entirely given up. But orthodoxy has still a great deal to do with the Devil. Superstition and priestcraft continue to assign him a degree of power quite equal, if not superior, to that of the Almighty. The priests describe him as omnipresent, and carrying on a great deal of business in the world. His friends and adherents are much more numerous than the orthodox elect, if we are to credit certain statistics of the day. They are all his active agents and faithful laborers, and he superintends in person, and sets the whole at work. And he reaps large profits from his business. He makes sure of something like seven-eighths (some say more) of the whole human race. And his empire is to endure to eternal ages. According to the bible testimony, it is God's will it should be destroyed—he would have all men saved—he would put an end to sin and death; but then there is a devil who is powerful enough (if the orthodox creed be true) to counteract his will, and baffle his designs. Satan's cause and kingdom are to flourish to eternity.

Such, in substance, are the teachings of orthodoxy in regard to a personal Devil. Now if all this be true, the devil has gained the mastery over God, who is unable to conquer and put him down. The great part of mankind will fall into his clutches, to be tormented to an endless eternity, and God, though he strives hard, cannot prevent it! Thus, the power of the Almighty is overmatched, and he is unable to consummate his benevolent designs in favor of a race whom he created in his own image! Sin and death will triumph to endless ages, in opposition to his will—in defiance of all his efforts for their extermination! The evil demon has usurped the supremacy—the scepter of Sovereignty has been wrested from the hands of Je-

hovah—Satan is the victor, and God the vanquished!! These inferences are inevitable.

A somewhat different version from this, though not less absurd and impious, is given by some orthodox writers, to the doctrine respecting the devil. They, in substance, represent God as disposed to favor the devil, and to gratify him in his wishes. As they have it, God and the devil act in conjunction, or alliance together. The devil instigates and tempts people to sin; and so also "God moves, executes, and stirs up men to do that which is sinful," and "deceives, blinds, hardens, and puts sin into the heart." Nay, he vouchsafed and guaranteed to the devil, by an absolute decree, the greatest part of mankind, reserving to himself but a mere remnant. And this, we are told, God did for his own glory; though it would seem he meant to have the devil glorified, if extensive empire confers glory.*

Very many, to this day, fall in with the silly superstition about a personal devil, with huge horns and a cloven foot. The priests are very anxious to keep up the scarecrow as long as possible; for it answers their purpose admirably well. But the time is not far distant, when demonism will be regarded as an idle absurdity, the same as witchcraft now is; when indeed most of the superstitious notions and ridiculous doctrines now in vogue, will be viewed as the wretched relics of former folly and fanaticism.

The priests have got to be rather ashamed of the devil, as no doubt he is of them. Should they represent him to be as important a personage as they formerly did, they would become a laughingstock to the people. And so he fills a much less conspicuous place in their discourses than formerly.

As to the doctrine of personal election and reprobation, they have come to the prudent conclusion to say but little about it. They find they cannot discuss it without contradicting themselves, and involving the whole subject-matter in a labyrinth of confusion; and so they seldom meddle with it. Other inconsistent doctrines they try to get along with as well as they can, though they often make bungling work.

Notwithstanding orthodoxy has been so often new-vamped and new-varnished, yet its incongruities and absurdities are quite as numerous as ever, perhaps more so; though they may not stand forth in as prominent relief as in by-gone years.

Few people of intelligent minds are found to embrace the orthodox creed, unless they are impelled to do so by self-interest, popularity, fashion, fanatical excitement, or the influence

* "If sin be for the glory of God on earth, it will be for his glory hereafter in heaven. If he ordained it, he will glorify it." If "*Sin is for the greatest good*," as Hopkins maintained, then "heaven cannot be a very good place unless sin adorn it." *History of Defection*, p. 33.

of zealots. It is obvious, that orthodoxy will be able to go but few years longer, in this enlightened age.

CHAPTER XII.

CONTENTS.—The unpopularity of the old system of rigid Calvinism afforded opportunity for other sects to gain footing. The plausibility of new sects. Orthodoxy has latterly assumed a more specious character and deportment. Of the Baptists, and other *partialists*, who do not differ materially in sentiment from the Orthodox. Equally engaged in fighting against the advance of liberal opinions, notwithstanding their rivalships. The great object of the clergy of the *partialist* stamp, is to get money, and live in affluence and ease without labor. Proselyting—revivals—Sabbath Schools—tracts, &c.

Doctrines like those which have been brought under notice in the two preceding chapters, are enough to shock and disgust all reflecting minds, not biassed by education and warped by tradition. Their necessary tendency is, to bring religion into disrepute, and to drive thousands into the precincts of infidelity. While the orthodox clergy continued to hold forth such doctrines in all their rigor, both they and their preaching could not fail, as the public mind became more enlightened, to become more and more unpopular; and especially as they uniformly evinced a decided disposition to invade the rights of conscience, and to lord it over those of a different way of thinking, and were constantly striving to get their order invested with extraordinary privileges and immunities, and its pre-eminence over all other sects established by law.

The more intelligent and virtuous portion of the community, who had got rid of the shackles of superstition, as well as swarms whom Calvinistic preaching had made either infidels or *nothingarians*, were ready to avail themselves of the first opportunity to “get off” from the compulsory support of an order of clergy, whom they had ceased to respect, and whose doctrines of ultra Calvinism they disbelieved and abhorred. The *imprudence* of the orthodox clergy had paved the way for the easy introduction of rival sects. The Baptists and Methodists came in, and their increase was rapid.*

* New sects, in order to gain footing, will humbly creep along for a while, and exhibit a meek and plausible deportment. But as soon as they have ingratiated themselves into popular favor, they will assume a loftier carriage. The public beast must first be coaxed and flattered, but once mounted, and at the mercy of the rider, the rankest spur may be thrust into his side. Power is dangerous in the hands of *any* sect.

The orthodox, for a length of time, thought they could hunt down these new comers, by persecution and slander; but this course served only to accelerate the progress of the despised upstarts. They saw their mistake at last; but not until they found a formidable rivalship at their heels to encounter with.

Orthodoxy is no longer what it once was, but has been metamorphosed into a thing of mere expediency. Instead of the *naked* monster it was some five-and-twenty years ago, it is now exhibited in parti-colored habiliments, and tricked out in borrowed plumes. Its carriage is less assuming, its tone wonderfully softened. Its whole plan of operations is also completely changed. It once dictated; it now flatters. It once thundered out anathemas; it now coaxes and invites. It was once frowning and austere; it is now complaisant, insinuating, pathetic. It once extorted money by law, and robbed the poor man of his cow, whose milk supported his children;* it now stoops to carry round the humble hat. It takes lessons of its rivals, and imitates the example of those whom it formerly disdained. To rescue its waning popularity from utter annihilation, it neither scruples to superadd a little Arminianism to its creed, nor scorns to adopt a little Methodism in practice.

The Baptists style themselves Calvinists, and their creed is not essentially different from that of the Orthodox. The Methodists, though they disavow Calvinism, advocate many of the leading doctrines of the Orthodox, such as endless punishment, &c. There are other sects also, who adhere to the orthodox dogmas, more or less. Indeed these several sects do not differ very materially from each other, but advocate the same general stamp of doctrine. All *partialists*, or those who hold that God is a partial being, to whatever sect they may belong, may be regarded as substantially orthodox, though differing on some points from that creed. Consequently, many of my remarks respecting orthodoxy, and the orthodox people, especially in subsequent pages, will be found equally applicable to all such denominations as hold to doctrines kindred in grain to the orthodox faith.

Now the ministers of these different, but kindred sects, notwithstanding they are rivals in the business of gaining proselytes and getting money, are alike engaged in fighting against the advance of liberal opinions and rational religion, as they are alike interested in keeping up that system of superstition from which they derive so much profit to themselves. Superstition is indeed the aliment on which they subsist. Let the principles of truth every where prevail, and priestcraft (equally an imposition) would be sorrier business than peddling *wooden nutmegs*.

*More than one instance has occurred, in which a poor man's cow has been attached and sold at auction to pay his ministerial tax.

From time immemorial, the ministers of superstition, by whatever sectarian appellation designated, have been an arrogant and indolent set of men, who have plotted "to live without labor on the earnings of those who do labor." Such has been the drift of all the impositions and pious frauds, which the holy knaves have practised upon the credulous and indulgent of mankind. Money—*money* is the great desideratum of the whole craft, from the Rev. D. D., who, clothed in his pompous robe, delivers his learned discourse in a magnificent church, to the tune of one, two, or three thousand dollars a year, down to the itinerant pedlar of the Gospel, who holds forth in barns or the open air, and is fain to receive the coppers and four-pences which are collected in the hat, or otherwise in the box of some "Cent" or "Mite Society." Our modern priests, of the *partialist* stamp, put all their wits to work to make proselytes—for the more dupes and proselytes they can make, the more amply the Lord's treasury (as they impiously term it) will be replenished. And for the purpose of making proselytes, they put all their dexterity and address in requisition in getting up religious excitements, or what they term "religious revivals"—imputing such "revivals" to the agency of the Divine Spirit, when they well know that they themselves mechanically get them started, and that these feverish excitements are mostly, as there is reason to believe, the work of fanaticism and delusion. To further their designs, the partialist priests have of late years invented an entire new system of tactics. The getting up their "revivals"—the introduction of their Sabbath Schools, in order to imbue the youthful mind with orthodox superstitions—the circulating of millions of Tracts, as the most convenient and successful mode of propagating their peculiar tenets—the Missionary enterprise—the educating, by charity, of hundreds of indigent (or rather *indolent*) and pious young men for the ministry, &c. &c.,—these things are so many auxiliaries of modern priestcraft, called into the field to strengthen itself withal. In the two following chapters, I shall briefly touch upon some of these matters.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONTENTS.—On the system of proselyting, or making converts. The old method laid aside, and new machinery adopted. Who are most liable to be deluded. People are prone to be deceived by their own imagination and excited feelings. Note, describing a scene at a Methodist Camp Meeting. On hurrying new converts to join the church. Extravagance of zeal during revivals. Fanatical excitements have no tendency to mend the moral character. Fanaticism sometimes leads to suicide. Operates variously on persons of different temperament. Imagination. The ministers pretend great love for *souls*, but would have us think the love of *money* never enters their heart. Sabbath Schools. Their design. The real object of certain Societies of the day.

I shall now make some few remarks upon the modern mode of proselyting, or making converts. My limits will not allow me to attempt any minute description of the ordinary method adopted by the priests, in conducting this business. I can merely furnish some general outlines.

The orthodox priests were obliged to abandon, at least, apparently so, their old doctrine that the number of the elect, and of the non-elect, “is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished;” for their hearers had got their eyes open to the truth that, if this doctrine be true, then is all preaching useless, and so multitudes became weary of paying (especially of being compelled by law to pay) for preaching which could do them no possible good. It was found expedient therefore, to fling aside the old doctrine, and to tell people that they can easily “get religion,” if they will only follow their directions; knowing that all whom they can get to join the church, will fork over money to the minister. The old method of making proselytes one by one, by preaching their obsolete doctrines of superstition, they concluded to abandon; the process was too laborious and tardy. They envied the success of their rivals, who, with their greatly improved machinery in operation, were making converts by the wholesale. So they stole the Methodist patent, and now they are all for fanatical excitements. They are very dexterous in working the machinery. The Baptists are also well versed in the art.

These protestant jesuits well understand how to work upon the imagination, the fears, and the sympathies, of the young, the inexperienced, and the simple. The ignorant, the credulous, those who are nervous, or of delicate health, silly women, effeminate men, and green saplings, are the best subjects for them to work upon. They know how to frighten—to put people under what is called “concern of mind;” and that is styled conviction. They know, too, how to soothe the passions—to calm the tempest they have raised, and that calm is

called conversion. In a word, they understand human nature, and how to take advantage of its weakness. And they manage matters with all the characteristic cunning and address peculiar to the craft.

How susceptible are human passions of being mechanically wrought upon! How wild and extravagant are the workings of a heated and distempered imagination! What false illusions, what raving zeal, what intemperate bursts of fanaticism those workings oftentimes produce, when the mind is once wrought up to a high pitch of excitement by the preaching of modern revivalists! The mind is in a state of perfect delirium; and this mania is communicated by sympathy from one to another, and spreads like wildfire. Now it is plain, that this fevered excitement, this effervescence of feeling, is produced by an agency very different from that divine spirit of truth and love and righteousness which comes to the heart as a "still, small voice." And yet such fanatical excitement is presumptuously represented to be the work of God—and the subjects of this hallucination are deluded with the idea that this is really a supernatural work, thinking they have "met with a change of heart" and "experienced religion!" It must be allowed, in justice, that the Orthodox and Baptists are less chargeable with fanatical extravagance, than the Methodists.*

Whenever a few enterprising managers have succeeded in getting a revival started, the usual method is, to hurry on matters as fast as possible for proselytes have to be quickly made, or not at all. The youth especially, (such more particularly is the Baptist way) as soon as their imagination and feelings are wrought up to a certain pitch, or to what is called experiencing religion, are forthwith invited, urged, persuaded to make immediate profession of religion, as though mature consideration were not allowable, nor time necessary to reflect, on a subject of so great moment as that of religion. Even persons whose lives have been grossly vicious and scandalous, are often admitted into churches at once, as though the more prudent course of delaying their admission for a season, to test the sincerity and durableness of their reformation, were unlaw-

*I remember being at a Methodist Camp Meeting some years ago, I heard a great outcry in one of the tents, and saw great numbers crowding in. I went in with the rest, and saw a young man flat on his back, crying out "Glory to God! Glory to God!" which he continued till he became quite hoarse, and at last completely exhausted, when he sunk into a stupor. As he lay on his back, rolling up his eyes, with his features distorted, and vociferating "Glory to God!" I heard a minister, pointing to the young man, observe to a bystander, "There you see the mighty power of God displayed in the slaying of that youth." This remark was probably intended for *effect*. I thought then, as I think now, that God has little to do with the agencies which produce such indecent and pitiable fanaticism.

ful. But numbers, numbers are everything; for the more gulls are caught, the more money for the minister.

During religious revivals, as they are called, the young, the inexperienced and feeble-minded become overheated with zeal, and religion is made all the theme—as if it alone consisted in praying long and loud in-clamorously exhorting others to get religion, and constantly talking and making an extravagant ado about it. Meetings are held by night and by day, to the neglect oftentimes of secular business and domestic duties, and also in disregard both of health and decorum. At such meetings the exercise of *gifts* are urgently called for—when perhaps those who are invited to the display possess no gifts; as the people of Israel were required to furnish bricks without straw. Ignorance becomes a teacher—zeal without knowledge an expounder—youth vies with age, and sex with sex in the rivalry of religious display. But in a few fleeting months, the paroxysm or mania will be over, when an impartial spectator will probably be unable to discover any trace of a permanent impression left on the mind or heart of those who were the subjects of it, indicating any material change for the better: all has vanished or faded away. He that *was* unrighteous, will be likely to be unrighteous still; and the sow that was washed, will peradventure return to her wallowing in the mire. No new energy will be seen superadded to that which *was* virtuous principle; no heavenlier charm to that which *was* amiable innocence. In many cases, restraints upon what *was* vice, will not be found multiplied, and conscience will no oftener deter the late subject of this frenzied excitement of feeling, from the commission of deeds of baseness, than it previously did. Human nature will evince the same depravity as before; the backbiter and defamer will return to their usual occupation; envy will resume its former character; avarice will worship as devoutly at the shrine of Mammon as in months gone by, and vindictiveness kindle as quickly and burn with the same force as ever. Formality and hypocrisy may indeed succeed enthusiasm, and dissimulation give a smoother surface to the character. The outward appearance may be changed, but the inward man will be essentially the same. The individual may learn to be more subtil in inventing methods to pacify his conscience, and justify his iniquity and selfishness; and, by his spiritual juggling and legerdemain, may succeed in deceiving many. I will not say that this representation will invariably hold true; but such is the frequent, if not the common result of fanatical excitement. It does little or nothing towards establishing the principles of true piety and virtue, permanently in the mind and heart.

“Faith, expanded by the ardors of zeal, often stretches beyond the utmost confines of possibility.” No absurdity but

will be readily swallowed by some people, when under the influence of fanaticism.

Not a few instances have occurred of people, under the influence of religious frenzy, becoming deranged, and committing suicide; and, surely, the horrid doctrines preached by fanatics, are enough to unhinge the mind of any person not possessed of iron nerves, the strongest intellect and the soundest health.

Fanaticism operates variously on different people, according to their constitutional temperament. Some, of a sanguine nature and lively fancy, it inspires with perfect assurance of their own salvation, and fills them with high and sudden transports. Others, of a melancholy make, it depresses with a heavy gloom, casting a dark and dismal shade over all their thoughts and feelings. Others again, who are morbidly sensitive, it alternately raises to the highest transports, and sinks to the lowest depths of despondency. As to the phlegmatic, they are not subject to catch the fever of fanaticism, but rather are predisposed to cold and calculating hypocrisy.

How often is the warm glow of mere imagination mistaken for regeneration, and the agency of the Divine Spirit! When imagination droops, the mind is left in doubt and darkness. The impulse is usually of brief continuance—the fever soon subsides, for imagination seldom continues long on the wing. Again imagination renews its flight, and fictitious faith and hope are revived, and delirious joy dances in ecstasies. But these renewals of “religious experience,” (so termed) are usually productive of less intensity of fanatical feeling than distinguished the first impression, because the additional effect of novelty is now wanting.

Thus much for fanaticism, and the way in which fanatical excitements are got up and managed by modern priestcraft. The gospel or rather the doctrines of partialism, are *professedly* preached out of pure disinterested benevolence, and love of souls. The priests pretend to make great sacrifices, in their zealous and unwearied labors of love and compassion for poor, perishing sinners; their word for it, *the love of money* never crept into the heart of a “godly minister”—they don’t preach (not they) for the sake of money.

Sabbath Schools, in the way they are conducted, are another invention of priestcraft. Their design is, not so much to give the rising generation a right understanding of the true principles of Christianity, as to inculcate superstition and sectarianism—to bias the youthful mind in favor of orthodoxy, or at least, the system of partialism.—History informs us, that the sly, insinuating, plausible Jesuits of former times, sought to get the education of the young under their management and control, as much as possible, to enable them to inculcate their

religion the more successfully. Our modern priests are but little behind the Jesuits in cunning.

I would observe in this connection, that the real object of most of the numerous Societies of the day, instituted by the clergy or over which they exercise the principal control, such as Missionary Societies, Tract Societies, Bible Societies, Education Societies, Peace Societies, &c., &c., however commendable the *professed* object of some of these institutions may be, is notoriously to give a more efficient organization and extensive influence to priestcraft, and to furnish it with facilities for accomplishing its selfish designs.—A few comments on the Missionary enterprise, will be found in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONTENTS.—On the Missionary enterprise. A project to get money. On educating “indigent and pious young men for the ministry,” by charity. The object in establishing so many pretended charitable institutions.

“Go ye into all the world, and preach *the gospel* to every creature,” was the injunction of Christ to his apostles; and so our modern priests affect to regard it as an imperative duty to have Missionaries sent into remote heathen lands to preach *Calvinism* (or some other system of sectarianism equally inconsistent with the gospel) to the heathen. Therefore Missionaries “compass sea and land to gain one,” or some few, proselytes, at an expense of some hundreds of thousands of dollars, drawn from the pockets of the people by virtue of a certain *charm*, or potent spell, called *pious flattery*, which those only who understand priestly mysteries know how to use. It is shrewdly suspected by many, however, that a great proportion of all this money goes for purposes very different from that which is pretended. Be this as it may, the priests have the handling, and are charged with the distribution, of all the immense sums of money which are annually collected for the support of Missions; and *they know how to monopolize the greater share of the credit of the charity DISPLAYED in this great labor of love.*

To induce people to give money to the Missionaries, hosts of pretended philanthropists are constantly appealing to their sympathies; ay, and they do not forget to tickle their vanity also. They represent, that millions of poor heathen are annually going down to endless perdition, for the want of the gospel

being sent to them to teach them the way of salvation; but they seem to forget what the apostle saith, that they who are without law, "become a law unto themselves, accusing or else excusing them"—for they choose to cling to the old Calvinistic tenet, that "those not professing the Christian religion" (and if they never heard of it, they cannot profess it) "cannot be saved in any other way whatsoever," (that is, in any other way than professing it) "be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the law of that religion they profess." Millions, nay hundreds of millions, are exposed to endless burnings, and must all be inevitably damned, unless missionaries be sent to preach the gospel to them! And many people are such simpletons that they are made to believe this! Now where is the person who believing this to be true, if a single ray of compassion ever warmed his breast, would *not* give, would *not* make *any* sacrifice and submit to *any* privation, sooner than have even *one* soul go down to the regions of endless wo and despair, if the means were in his hands to prevent it? No wonder, that such immense sums of money are collected, to support missions.

But are the priests, who are constantly and zealously urging people to give, and, to induce them to do so, are accustomed to dwell so much upon the deplorable condition of the heathen—are the priests themselves, who are even greedy to get hold of the *cents* which are given to little children, and do not scruple to make their levies even upon the pittance of squalid poverty, to increase the missionary fund, are *they* over-liberal in their contributions in aid of the missionary cause? Very far from it. They may indeed give *something*, to set an example for others; but they seem abundantly more willing to heap heavy and grievous burdens upon other men's shoulders, than to touch them themselves with one of their fingers. But they well know the use of "flattering words," and how to draw the "cloak of covetousness" tight around them. (See 1 Thes. 2. 5.) They urge it upon people as a duty, to dispense with many of the little comforts of life, such as the use of sugar in their tea, &c., and to appropriate what may be saved in this way to missionary purposes. But *they* are not willing to make any retrenchment in their luxurious way of living, whether the heathen perish or not. *They*, at all events, must have their fine houses, fine coaches, and costly furniture, and wear the finest broadcloth, dress their wives in splendid silks, and load their tables with sumptuous dainties.

What shall we say of the *sincerity* of men, who, to induce people to give to Missions, are constantly representing in their Tracts, which they every where circulate, that "every dollar given to the Missionary cause, may be the means of saving some poor soul from endless wo"—when, according to their

own hypothesis, by appropriating say one half of their \$1000 salaries to this purpose, (which they could easily do, and still be better off than the majority of those whom they are urging to give,) each of these men might annually furnish the means of saving *five hundred* souls from the same endless wo? Oh fie, ye priests! how does your practice give the lie direct to the sincerity of your professions!

When Missionary sermons are preached, as they frequently are, it is the custom of the ministers, not only to dwell pathetically upon the perishing condition of the wretched heathen, in order to move people to liberality, but also to expatiate upon the duty and blessed privilege of giving. They have a string of texts which they usually bring in on these occasions, such as, "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver," and, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," &c. And they have much to say about "the Lord's treasury," assuming that he employs *them* to be the keepers of it. They want people to give to the Lord, (not to *them!*) as though he were a poor man; when it is written that "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof;" and again, "The cattle on a thousand hills are his."

Much is said about the immense sacrifices which those make, who enter upon a Missionary life. To bid adieu to the scenes of youth, and the enjoyments of home—to friends, connexions, country—with the prospect of encountering unknown perils, hardships and privations in barbarous lands, is deemed an effort of self-denial which those only who are actuated by the most exalted and disinterested motives are alone capable of. People therefore, it is argued, ought to be willing to give of their substance, to sustain these self-devoted servants of the Lord, as they are styled, in their glorious undertaking, and are bound each one to do some little for the cause, as others are doing so much. This argument has great weight with many; but it should be borne in mind, that enough young men, of a roving and romantic turn, will ever be found ready to engage in any enterprize which may call them to distant lands, and that the personal sacrifices which such make, in quitting home, friends and country, to them are not great. Besides, the missionary is sure of a fame, which even the martyr might envy; and the sympathy of half Christendom will follow his footsteps. We all know, that the love of distinction is a powerful passion with many.

But perhaps no motive to induce people to give to Missions, is more successfully appealed to than that of vanity. To see their names annexed to the charitable list, and published in magazines and religious newspapers, and to have their charity talked about, and extolled, and blazoned abroad, is so gratifying to the vanity of even some *pious* ones, that they will give what covetousness would otherwise withhold, a reluctant dol-

lar, even if they acquired it *by grinding the faces of the poor*, or saved it by passing by the distressed.

It is a fact, that missionary labors have hitherto accomplished next to nothing, towards converting heathen nations. And yet what glowing descriptions of success are sent home, by the missionaries! Their exaggerated statements are gathered together in a mass, and dilated upon, by our reverend priests, to make credulous enthusiasts verily think, that the Lord is carrying on a marvelous work among the heathen, and thus spur them up to make more vigorous efforts to help him along, by contributing their money more bountifully.

As an auxiliary to priestcraft, the Missionary project works admirably. Many years ago, the priests finding their power and popularity on the wane, devised this scheme, thinking it would lengthen and strengthen their lever, and moreover put a considerable loose change into their pockets. It is a masterpiece of policy. Before the plan was invented, the old machinery of priestcraft had got sadly disarranged. Things now move on like clock-work.

Little good can accrue to the heathen from the propagation of the sectarian doctrines which the Missionaries are laboring to spread among them. But it would doubtless prove an unspeakable blessing to them, could their minds be illuminated with the true light of Christianity.

The inhabitants of every region have such light to direct them, and such laws to regulate their moral conduct, as the infinitely wise Creator has seen fit that they should have; and there can be no doubt, that very many among those whom we denominate heathen, more faithfully live up to the light they possess, than thousands do who boast of the infallible orthodoxy of their faith. I firmly believe, that Christ has written his perfect law of love on many a poor pagan's heart, who never heard of his name, or knew that he is the "Savior of all men."

Another device of the craft, is the system of raising funds by charity, for educating "indigent and pious young men for the ministry." One would think that the community was already pretty well stocked with ministers; but Dr. Beecher and some others have made estimates that several thousand more are urgently and immediately wanted, to supply those in the United States who have not the privilege of hearing "sound" doctrines preached by "competent" ministers. Therefore lots of indigent and pious young men must be manufactured into ministers. Now somebody must defray the expense of manufacturing, and as the "indigent" themselves are unable to do it, the charity of the community must be laid under contribution to pay the shot. And this again gives the clergy the handling of lots of money, which they can appropriate—as they please.

It is no mystery why the managers of priestcraft are so anxious to have as many ministers manufactured as possible. They know it is a reasonable presumption that the power and influence of the clergy will increase, in proportion to the increase of their number. Thousands of *man-made* ministers they would thrust into the priestly office, all of them pretending to have a call from God, but who are too evidently called by the prospect of gain. And they have contrived a plan of having a large share of them educated by *charity*, speciously extorted from the public.

As to indigent young men of piety, I doubt whether they get *all* the money which the pious beggars profess to collect for their education. But without some plausible pretext, the dollars and cents would not be forthcoming. Quite as often I believe, these charitable contributions are appropriated to educate ministers' sons, and certain favorites who need no assistance. An instance once occurred under my own observation, in which a young man who professed to be "pious," and was certainly *indolent*, ("*indigent*" he was not—his father was quite wealthy,) received \$85 from the Charity Fund, to enable him to finish his theological studies. He had already been 7 or 8 years plodding over his studies, and was more indebted to his books than he ever could be to his brains. But a member of the Committee of Appropriations was his particular friend, and so he got a goodly lift.

Many who have received a theological education and been inducted into the ministry, by the aid of a misplaced charity, have afterwards exemplified their *gratitude* by an insufferable display of arrogance. Like Jeshurun, the pampered animal waxed fat and kicked.

A theological education will qualify stupidity itself, to write sermons so learned that none can comprehend them; and in case of a total failure of brains, an expedient is ever at hand—authors may be consulted—Hopkins and Edwards, Scott, Gill and Fuller, and other great writers, will readily grace the discourse of the reverend orator with their lucid illustrations; and the multitude, without suspecting the plagiarism, will admire the gifts of the preacher. But notwithstanding, the stolen gems generally lose half their luster, in passing through the hands of imbecility.—

Certain Orthodox leaders, some years ago, announced that "*an extensive combination of institutions, religious, civil and literary,*" was to be formed forthwith. Of the ultimate design of this "*extensive combination,*" the reader must judge for himself. It looks like putting things in a train to bring about *the eventual union, in some form or other, of church and state.* And I think it may be easily explained why they are so eager to have the number of the clergy enlarged, and (in the language

of an unknown writer whom I have more than once quoted) “to form so many [pretended] Benevolent Societies, and to make them as *national* as possible—amalgamating them in a direct or indirect manner to subserve the interests” and designs of priestcraft. To carry out those designs, ample funds are required. Hence the device of so many schemes, the organization of so many Societies, *to get money*, under various plausible pretexts. The ministers moreover like a little pocket change as they go along, to furnish themselves with *extra comforts*, and their wives with *pin-money*.

CHAPTER XV.

CONTENTS.—The vindictive spirit of bigots and sectarians. The bitter contentions of brethren of the same communion. Note, describing a church quarrel. This vindictive and contentious spirit strictly forbidden in the bible. The implacability of bigoted priests. The real Christian knows how to forgive. Remarks on bigotry.

Much has already been said in former chapters, respecting sectarianism, bigotry, superstition, and hypocrisy. But on these topics I have something further to add; although the remarks I have now to make, would probably have been more appropriately introduced in connexion with my previous remarks on these subjects.

Bigots and sectarian zealots are of all men the most implacable in their hostility towards their opponents. Seizing on the veriest trifle perhaps, they make it the bone of bitter and everlasting contention. Now it is not so with the lowest characters in society. These will get drunk, quarrel, perhaps fight, but when the fume of liquor has cleared away, they most generally become good friends again. But to differ in opinion from a sectarian zealot, though on a non-essential point, is to become utterly out-lawed from his charity for ever. Sectarianism has caused more feuds, more discords, more persecution, more bloodshed, than all other agents of evil combined.

This implacable temper is frequently manifested by the bigoted and contentious, towards individuals of the same communion. The Baptists in particular, are much given to church-quarreling. Suppose a brother shall walk disorderly; or suppose, what is oftener the case, that some private pique has led one brother, to bring some imputed fault of another brother, before the church: how seldom will the aggrieved party be seen to give any quarter to the offender! With what difficul-

ty is the breach healed! The contending parties, on such occasions, not unfrequently assume an armor more suited to demons than to the meek disciples of the Prince of Peace; and this armor once girded on, is perhaps never laid aside. And this they mistake for the Christian panoply! Those engaged in the pious quarrel pretend, and, without doubt, oftentimes verily think, that they are prompted by the purest zeal to vindicate the honor of religion, and promote a most blessed cause; when, peradventure, all grows out of personal revenge, or results from the spirit of contention, so natural to some men.*

How different is this implacability of temper from the meek, peaceable, forgiving spirit which Paul enjoins! "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts." Col. 3. 12 to 15. Peter also speaks in like manner. "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speaking, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." 1 Pet. 2. 1, 2, 3.

But among the clergy, at the present day, we find but few who possess the spirit of either Paul or Peter. It is easier to appease the wrath of an Achilles, than that of a bigoted priest. His ire is inexorable. He has no scruple in consigning his opposers to endless perdition. Reverence him as though he were a superior being, and pay him money enough, and he bestows his blessing—he pronounces you to be "within the ark of safety." But act independently, and dare to disregard his

*I confess I have sometimes been so wicked, that I could not forbear smiling at the ludicrous exhibition occasionally made of the pious quarrels of certain church members. They take place much in the following manner. A gets angry or *mad* with B. Now it will never do for A to say to the church that he is *mad* with brother B; but he tells them that he is sadly "grieved" at his conduct, and states the item or items of his delinquency. He cannot in conscience commune with brother B; no, no, good pious soul, indeed he cannot; he is sorely "grieved." Well, he gets brother B well "church-mauled," and then his "grief" is cured, and he feels more comfortable. Now, in fact, to begin with, he was as *mad* with B as a game-cock, striving to pick out the eyes of his antagonist. But A, in turn, must now look to his own conduct, for B will watch him close, and if he finds any flaw in him, he will be sure to reciprocate the favor, and so balance the account. Seriously, what a stain are such scenes to the cause of religion, and what a stumbling block to the world!

dictation, or withhold a plentiful supply of cash, and immediately

“ He takes off his blessing, and whacks on a curse.”

But he always disguises his malice under some specious form.

It is known by some, what persecution the writer formerly suffered, at the hands of a contumacious bigot.—Let us beware of those who wield the weapons of vengeance *in the name of the Lord, and professedly to do him service!* Their religion, relentless as death, knows no mercy, no remorse: a religion compounded of harsh vindictive bigotry, and soulless hypocrisy. Wake the ire of that man who possessess it, and he will never rest till he has had his revenge upon you. But the real christian, impelled by the divine principle of charity and forbearance, knows how to forgive an enemy, or an erring brother, seventy times seven. Whereas, bigoted and contentious hypocrites, whether offended or offending, never forgive.

The spirit of bigotry is truly devil-like. Rivers of blood have flowed to appease its wrath. It presumes to usurp the prerogative of Him, who hath said, “Vengeance is mine.” It assumes the sacred name of religion, that it may the more successfully exert its tyranny. He who inherits this malignant spirit, like the vulture, delights to gorge himself on the vitals of humanity. But as he is not suffered, in our happy America, to employ the rack, the faggot and the wheel, he is obliged to be satisfied in dealing out denunciations of eternal wo. The hell of the orthodox creed, is the invention of malice. Orthodoxy, without hesitation, consigns to endless perdition all who do not tread in its track.

The bigot however, is not always conscious of the real motives by which he is actuated. He is generally as weak and deluded, as he is malignant. Hence he is worthy of pity, as well as detestation. Wrongheaded as he is, he is positive that what he believes is truth, and what he does is right.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONTENTS.—The corrupted religion of the present day does little to make mankind more virtuous. Less than the institution of Chivalry did in former times. The moral conduct of professors of religion no better, generally speaking, than that of non-professors. Some are so selfish they want to get the whole of this world, if possible, and make sure of heaven besides. Self-righteousness. The true Christian. On the Hopkinsian doctrine of *disinterested* benevolence.

The adulterated and mercenary Christianity which, with few exceptions, is inculcated at the present day, does little or nothing to elevate the tone of morals in society; the mythology of ancient Greece and Rome did far more, as would seem evident, in this important particular. Honor, integrity, justice, magnanimity, patriotism, it neither cherishes nor strengthens. Corruption, venality, selfishness, rapacity, it rather encourages than restrains. Even Chivalry, such as it originally was, ere it had run into ridiculous extravagance, did more to elevate and ennoble the human character, than ever did the preaching of a corrupt clergy; for it inculcated with great success the principles of valor, humanity, courtesy, justice, chastity, and honor. "It was regarded as the school of the most honorable refinement, encouraged the most delicate intercourse between the sexes, and enforced the nicest observance of all its engagements: as the standard of valor, religion, love, and virtue, its influence was irresistible." Christianity in its purity, is indeed infinitely superior to what Chivalry ever was, whilst it retained its best and brightest characteristics. The only reason why its influence has not been more salutary and happy, has been owing to its corruption and perversion.

Those splendid virtues which impart dignity and luster to the human character, are neither adapted to the views, nor congenial to the feelings, of the selfish and narrow-minded sectarian. Whether he be a weak bigot, whose ideas never traveled beyond the narrow bounds of tradition, and whose creed is taken on trust—or a heartless, deceitful hypocrite, who puts on only the semblance of virtue, he does not deem it worth while to cherish pure and exalted moral principle. Though he may talk much about charity, scarce a ray of genuine philanthropy ever animated his bosom. Nor has he magnanimity enough, to forgive the crime of maintaining a religious opinion which differs from his own. And what shall we say of those who, for ever harping about faith, as though faith alone could save, and disputing opinions, as though their salvation depended on their holding a correct one, affect to regard good works not only a valueless but dangerous? Professing to rely on the

merits of Christ for their salvation, it would seem that they regard it as superfluous to have any merit of their own. Do they forget that HIS life was an example of all duty—*an example for them to imitate*—and that his precepts comprehend all moral excellence?

As a general thing, it would be difficult, I believe, to discover any very perceptible or marked difference between the moral character of the professor, and that of the non-professor of religion. We find the former as worldly, as grasping, as proud, as overbearing, as aristocratic, as the latter, and frequently much more so. And in many instances, what is the boasted *charity* of the professor? I put this question, because *charity* is the very foundation virtue on which the Christian system of morality is built. Is it to relieve the poor and distressed? Does he not rather grind the faces of the poor, and extort from them without scruple or mercy, their last pittance, to add to his heap of riches?—from which, may be, he hands over with a grudging hand a few dollars to the minister, that he may not doubt his piety, and a dollar to the Missions, knowing that this last *charity* will be proclaimed in some religious newspaper or magazine, or otherwise trumpeted abroad. I have known many such rapacious, covetous, niggardly, overreaching hypocrites. Self-righteousness and negative virtue, they have in abundance. They attend meetings constantly, pray in their families, are formal and precise, and punctiliously keep a fair outside show. And with what severity will they frown on the most trifling faults of others! But, after all, is their religion—their pretended sanctity, anything more than mere surface? the mere result of habit and tradition, or otherwise of downright hypocrisy? View them closely, and you will find them far less humane, just, and benevolent than many of their non-professing neighbors. The difference, as regards moral virtue, by no means lies in their favor. But, their word for it, the line of demarcation between them and non-professors, is very distinctly drawn. *They* are numbered with *the sheep*, and are sure of salvation; but *non-professors* are poor wretched *goats*, and fit subjects for endless punishment!

It methinks it would be a puzzling thing for any common person to distinguish, by “their life and conversation,” the saints from the sinners. According to Calvinism, the Devil does not know them apart; for if he did, “he would be a fool to worry himself to tempt the elect, or trouble his head about the reprobates; for the latter are already his by an irrevocable decree,” as the former can never be his, let *him* do what he can, or *they* what they will. But if the Devil’s ignorance of God’s secret decrees, did not prevent him from knowing who are his, and who are not, he would be equally at a loss to know, if he were to judge by the moral conduct of professed saints, and those

who are *not* professed saints. It is also a direct inference from the Calvinistic doctrine, that "Christ himself did not know the elect from the reprobates; and therefore died for *all* to make sure of a *few!*" But he gave his followers a rule by which they might distinguish the *good* from the *bad*, the *righteous* from the *unrighteous*. "By their *fruits* ye shall know them." Now although it may be easy to tell *good* fruit from *corrupt* fruit, it must be extremely difficult and puzzling to distinguish corrupt fruit from corrupt fruit.

Very many of the professed saints are remarkable for their *prudent thrift*—they mean to husband matters so well as to get a goodly share of this world's goods, and moreover a satisfactory security for a heavenly inheritance; and they look out sharp to get hold of both these boons at as cheap a rate as possible. Such have a peculiar tact for serving God and Mammon at one and the same time. They can mould conscience and accommodate their religion, with the greatest ease and readiness, to the views of self-interest. And I have known some who entertained the notion, that rich saints will hold a higher seat in Heaven, than those will who acquire little or nothing of this world's goods; or, as it is sometimes expressed, the rich will sit in the parlor, while the poor will have to do the drudgery in the kitchen.

Although, generally speaking, our modern religionists are not to be accused of being overstocked with virtuous principle, they have at least self-righteousness enough, and to spare.—The self-righteous man, though chargeable with no vice, is sure to be *guilty* of no virtue. In his own eyes he is perfect; for he is scrupulously observant of formalities, and never violates any of the ten commandments. But all positive goodness, all active benevolence, he practically regards as supererogation. He has no desire, and makes no efforts, to do good to his fellow-creatures. And yet he has a high conceit of his own worth, and thinks himself holier than others.

Self-righteousness, pharisaism, formality and negative virtue, we see exhibited in great profusion. But true religion—sterling virtue, is scarce. Deeply is it to be lamented, that so many professed Christians permit even heathen people, who are guided only by the dim light of nature, to go beyond them in moral virtue. Alas! has not *immorality* been aided by the very institutions professedly established to check it? All history shows that corrupted christianity has ever exerted an unfavorable influence on the morals of mankind.

A true Christian, instead of relying on imaginary past experience of a saving change, or like the boastful Pharisee, thanking God that he is not as other men, will be intent at all times, to fulfil every demand of duty. He will evince to the

world, with meekness and humility, "his faith by his works." He knows that "faith by works is made perfect;" that "faith without works is dead;" and he makes the inquiry with the apostle James, "What doeth it profit, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works?" Not that he presumptuously expects to be saved by his works—for salvation is the gift of God. He is ever mindful of the Saviour's injunction, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect." And he is ever mindful of the obligations of duty he is under to his God and Savior, to mankind, and to his own soul. He will preserve the same purity of principle, the same correctness of conduct, in every situation, and at all times. Nor is the practice of benevolence, the faithful discharge of every incumbent duty, a burden of which he seeks to rid himself whenever opportunity admits. Such a man is an ornament to society, and he will have, or ought to have, the good will of all. In him we see the genuine fruits of religion. *His* religion lifts him above the selfish propensities and narrow feelings of the bigot and hypocrite, and renders him worthy of his profession.

Notwithstanding our modern religionists are so lamentably deficient in point of morality, they talk much and loud of their philanthropy and *disinterested* benevolence.—The perfection of holiness, according to Hopkins, (and the orthodox cling to the opinion) consists in *disinterested* benevolence; and this principle is carried to such lengths by the orthodox, that they represent that a person ought so completely to renounce his self-love as to be willing to be eternally damned! But is any such doctrine found in the Bible? "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Self-love is permitted to go as far as social. Ourselves and our neighbor we are to love equally. It is not the office of religion to strike from the soul the principle of self-love; nor is the thing possible. By the way, there is no selfishness, I suppose, in certain priests, when they expatiate so largely on the duty of *disinterested* benevolence, whenever they would extort money from people, pretendedly for some very pious purpose or other. Admirably in keeping, one would think, for an indomitable worshiper of Mammon to prate about *disinterested* benevolence! Not a few I have known of such *conscientious* sharpers and *pious* sharks, their greedy covetousness is such, they do not scruple to "sell the poor for a pair of shoes;" to rob the widow and fatherless; nay, to rob a hen-roost, or *concoct a conspiracy to dispossess an unfortunate son of his just inheritance!* They are eager for all the world, and Heaven besides; and yet honest men are to be insulted with their cant about *disinterested* benevolence.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONTENTS.—Christians are forbidden to be the followers of this man or of that man. The usual practice of the teachers of superstition is, to give religion an unlovely character. The excellence of the Sacred Volume. The great value of pure and undefiled religion. Hypocrisy fails to achieve its object. The importance of moral virtue. Faith and profession vain, without charity and other Christian virtues. The character of a sincere and honest Christian. An allusion to priestcraft. A servile laity mere wax in the hands of the clergy. A few questions to the priests. Remarks respecting the clergy. Their *amorous intrigues*.

The primitive Christians were commanded to be followers neither of Paul, nor of Apollos, nor of Cephas, but of Christ. Very little regard, however, is paid, or ever has been, to that command. Some style themselves the followers of Calvin, some of Luther, others of Wesley, &c. We hear of others again, who follow after Swedenborg, Ann Leese, Matthias, the founder of the Mormons, &c. Now, though people are forbidden in scripture to be the followers of any man, save the man Christ Jesus, the sectarian would have them pay no regard to the sacred prohibition but embrace a creed invented and instituted by men. And this they must do, on pain of being denounced as heretics, or infidels.

In preceding pages, I have noticed the multitude of creeds invented by man, and how the great mass of mankind have been led blindfold into every species of superstition. And I have shown, what is too evident to be disputed, that it is bigotry, superstition and base hypocrisy, which have armed so many with prejudices against true religion. I have also shown that religion is not the frenzy of a moment, but the steady and fixed principle of a well-ordered life.—Perhaps it is unnecessary to enlarge on subjects, which have already been discussed somewhat extensively. But if the patience of the reader is not exhausted, I have a few more desultory remarks to offer.

It has always been the practice of those who make it their business to teach superstition for a livelihood, to clothe religion in sombre habiliments—to give it a character repulsive and unlovely. And what adepts at caricature are they who give such coloring to religion! Look at their bigoted followers, with their faces disfigured, and all wrinkled down with superstition! These things ought not so to be; truth and goodness should wear an amiable and cheerful aspect. True Christianity can never fail to recommend itself by its own intrinsic charms; and those ministers who exhibit it in any other than the loveliest light, are “eminently unless” to mankind.

As men of reason and common sense, let us have done with human creeds, and turn to the Bible for our instruction. It

is a revelation worthy of the Deity. It amply proves its own truth. The moral perfections which the sacred volume delineates and inculcates, are a transcript of the Divine character. The goodness and glory of the Eternal God, are there loudly proclaimed in a voice not to be mistaken. *There* is taught a religion which none may gainsay. Alas! how has that religion been counterfeited, its institutions perverted, its doctrines corrupted!

Impartial observation will satisfy us, that the beneficent influence of religion on society, is in proportion to its purity. Oh! happy, unspeakably happy for the human race, did pure and undefiled religion every where prevail, in all its loveliness, in all its glory, in all its precious power to bless mankind! The great design of Christianity is to make men good and happy. It exempts no more from the obligation of good works, but condemns with great severity those who, professing to be guided by its principles, are deficient in moral virtue. Benevolence, charity, uprightness, justice, humanity, the bible every where inculcates. Why then do we see men, who profess a great regard and veneration for religion, so very deficient in these noble and excellent virtues? Do not both the interest and the honor of christianity require that *practice* should invariably correspond with *profession*? And if the heart be right, will not this be the case? Does not good water flow from a pure fountain?

No hypocrisy can long deceive even short-sighted and credulous man. It is not possible to act a part successfully for a long time, which is foreign to the heart. Corrupt nature will out, and expose the deformity of the spirit within. But if man may be deceived, no deception, however artful and cunning, can be practised upon Him, who sees the inmost recesses of the heart.

Does not every page of the bible enjoin the practice of virtue and morality? By what authority, I would ask, do men dispense with these? What is faith without charity? What in the eye of God is a profession of religion, without the practice of pure morality? Because we cannot in this life arrive at perfection in virtue, are we therefore released from the obligation of striving to attain to it? Of what value or avail is pretended regeneration and sanctification, if they bear no good fruit? Yet we hear some boasting of their attainments in holiness and grace, who affect to consider and even to despise morality and virtue as insignificant things. I can never believe that accomplished hypocrisy, that affected gravity and sabbath-day sanctity, will sooner arrive at Heaven, than those truly christian virtues which shed their blessings on all around. This pure and perfect morality, Jesus Christ explained and recommended in his divine sermon on the mount. Shall his

lessons be disregarded and despised? How vain are faith, and hope, and profession, without charity, brotherly love, meekness, sincerity, honesty, forbearance and mercy! What! are we to suppose that false or fanatical faith will be rewarded, when connected with selfishness, knavery, revenge, evil-speaking, and the like detestable vices? How can any have the presumption to suppose it? Yet it is evident that many do. They try to lessen the importance of those virtues, which they do not love to practise. O ye subtil of heart, and full of all duplicity and guile! “be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

The example of a sincere and honest christian affords the best proof of the utility of pure and undefiled religion. The character of such a man is consistent with itself. It is not an admixture of mock, or of *monkish* virtues—rigid, austere, and unlovely—with those which are lax or equivocal: while many important virtues are totally absent. But *all* the virtues are there, and blended in harmony and due proportion. The great principle which imparts vitality, and regulates the whole—*love to God and love to man*—preserves a just equilibrium; all is order—simplicity—unity—stability. He who has formed such a character, is enabled to act in every situation and exigency, with promptitude and decision, and agreeably to correct principles. He knows himself: his character is not a perplexed maze, which neither himself, nor others can understand. There is no clash in his opinions, none in his feelings. He pursues a right onward course, turning neither to the right hand nor the left. He surveys at a glance the whole circle of his duties, and is constantly and cheerfully engaged in their performance.

To the sincere christian, how animating and consolatory is the reflection, that the period will sooner or later arrive, when all superstition and error and hypocrisy and false doctrine will be swept away, like chaff before the wind. But the great principles of truth and righteousness are as immutable and eternal as the God from whom they emanate. These will remain, in all their glory.

But as long as priestcraft shall be able to maintain its ascendancy, and exert its pernicious influence,—upheld by the ignorance and credulity of mankind, so long will superstition and hypocrisy be found, both in high places and low. It is still a melancholy truth, that a great proportion of the servile laity, are mere wax in the hands of the clergy, to be moulded at their pleasure. A subtil priest sees at once what an obsequious layman is fit for. If he finds him capable of duplicity and deceit, he will employ him as an instrument to further the cause of priestcraft; if he finds him stupid and honest, he will work him up to be a whining zealot. He knows how to manage both the cunning and the weak.

O ye priests! instead of serving the Lord, are ye not anxious rather to serve yourselves? Seek ye not, above all other things, the loaves and the fishes? Covet ye not the fare of the idol Bel—the wine, flour, &c.? And bring ye not polluted offerings to the altar of the Lord? What other impulse do ye obey than sheer selfishness? Well might an ancient philosopher gravely undertake to solve the problem, why priests are more covetous than other men. And wherefore do ye hypocritically censure the conduct of your predecessors, the Jesuits, when you yourselves act on the same principle, though disguised under a different form?

One would think that the priests would, ere now, have become satisfied, if anything can satisfy them, how utterly idle it is for them to attempt to establish anything in the shape of an *hierarchy* in this republican country: but is it not evident that such is still their hope and aim? The ambitious chiefs of priestcraft had better abandon their tantalizing hopes; their sleep would be sounder. The petty priests, who trudge more contentedly along, not presuming to carry their aims so high, are better off. I would remark by the way, that *weakly* ministers (and there are many such) are by no means initiated into the *high mysteries* of priestcraft.

Methinks our very pious clergy ought to be content with their present condition, and not covet an increase of power. Ay, and without indulging any—*concupiscences which ought to be nameless*. Cannot money, influence, homage, satisfy them, but they must be “darting their desiring eyes,” occasionally, at the frail daughters of Eve? A priest-ridden laity are not apt to gossip libidinous tales which implicate the conduct of a reverend libertine, to the detriment of his good name; for he is presumed to be *impeccable*. But truth will sometimes out, as the history of Avery, Phinney, Ray Potter, and many others, will attest. Of late we hear of fresh instances of the kind, *very* frequently. History (which has delineated priestcraft in its true colors) has not been silent respecting the amorous intrigues of priestly gallants. Such have indeed been occasionally repulsed by some over-scrupulous *Susannas!* But what do I? He that reports such things is an *infidel*, and *totally depraved*. Mum! say not a word about the promiscuous gallantries of the clergy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONTENTS.—Concluding remarks. A final thrust at the hypocrite. Truth, in its onward march, will, in the end, vanquish error and superstition.

Now, dear reader, in view of the abuses and perversions of Christianity, are you tempted to believe it is nothing more than a mere fable, invented by human policy, to subserve the purposes of selfish hypocrisy? Is it possible that the religion of Christ is nothing more than “a cunningly-devised fable?” Such a conclusion is truly an unfortunate one; and deeply is it to be lamented that any should be led to despise true religion itself, (which is indeed a divine treasure) because it has been mingled with alloy, and prostituted to vile purposes.

While the pure doctrines of the Bible are worthy of all confidence, it is the duty of no one to believe in creeds and doctrines of human invention, and which are repugnant to the dictates of reason. If any one has been so foolish, so impious, as to sell himself to a spurious creed, the transaction is neither lawful nor binding. But the true gospel is invaluable; and
LET US HOLD FAST THAT WHICH IS GOOD.

As to the hypocrite, we are told that “his hope shall perish.” He seeks but his own selfish gain, and comes in “sheep’s clothing” that he may the better accomplish his end. Though he may practice all the hypocritical austerities which distinguished Thomas a Becket, his ultimate views, like his, are fixed either on riches, aggrandizement, or power. When hypocrisy wears sackcloth, or “a sad countenance,” it seeks preferment, praise, power, or money. Pretend what he may, it is the god of this world which the hypocrite devoutly worships, and not Him who dwells in Heaven. His sordid soul cares nothing for his fellow-man; and yet he would have people think that *religion* has a dwelling in his heart! But does religion dwell in that heart which philanthropy and generous sympathy never visited, never warmed?

But I must soon come to a conclusion. I have omitted many things I intended to say when I commenced these strictures, and said some things perhaps unnecessary; but it is now too late to amend what is done, or supply what is wanting. Probably neither the priest nor the priest-ridden—the bigot, the fanatic, nor the hypocrite will thank me very heartily for the truth I have told them; though I trust they will all receive more or less benefit from my labors.—

TRUTH continues her glorious march, and will ultimately gain a complete victory over superstition and error. Pure and undefiled religion will then shine forth in all its heavenly

luster. Much has already been done towards vanquishing error, and reforming religious abuses. Nor let us think that new errors will spring up, as fast as ancient errors are rooted out. The latter had their origin in a period of the world comparatively unenlightened—have been cherished through a long succession of time—have attained a rankness almost impossible to be subdued—are nourished and defended by the sturdy prejudice of bigotry, and the indomitable selfishness of priestcraft and hypocrisy, and receive a blind and almost boundless veneration on account of their very antiquity. But once eradicated, a new growth of errors cannot easily or speedily start up to supply their place. Rational and consistent doctrines will then prevail. Priestcraft, with all its inventions, will be unable to maintain its empire over mankind. The work of delusion will cease. Men will see and understand truth for themselves, without the aid of juggling priests to interpret it; and seeing and understanding, they will profit themselves by the lamp which directs their feet. And when Christianity shall prevail in its purity, few indeed will be the number of *infidels* who will not return, from their wandering in the wilderness of doubt and unbelief, and come up to the courts of the Lord, with joy and thanksgiving, to worship Him “in the beauty of holiness.” Happy period! when the blighting influence of superstition shall no longer be exerted, to abridge, in any degree, human freedom and happiness, to retard the progress of intellectual improvement, extinguish the generous fires of genius, and suppress the beautiful light of science.

ERRATA.

From the *ninth* page to the *sixteenth*, several typographical errors occur, the most important of which are here noted.

Page 9, line 10, for *spirits*, read *spirit*.

Page 10, line 8 from bottom, for words, read cords.

Page 11, line 6 from bottom, for professor, read possessor.

Page 12, line 27, for demonstrative, read demonstrated.

Page 13, line 17, a note of exclamation should follow the word embraced, instead of a note of interrogation.

Page 13, line 20, the sentence which ends in this line should read as follows: Such is the result produced by the unhallowed ambition of sectarists, the ignorance of fanatics, and the controversial-pride and metaphysical subtilty of learned divines.

Page 13, line 13 from bottom, for sect, read sects.

Page 15, line 5, for *Orthodox*, read *Orthodoxy*.

Page 16, line 26, for divest, read divert.



Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: Feb. 2005

PreservationTechnologies

A WORLD LEADER IN PAPER PRESERVATION

111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
(724) 779-2111

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 013 805 622 3